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"CLARE," ERIC SAID, SUDDENLY, "WHY HAVE YOU DECEIVED ME ALL THIS TIME?"

FOR OLD LOVE'S SAKE

NOVELETTE.

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

CHAPTER I.

YES, he loved her, loved her with all his great heart.

One golden hair from the bright head of Clare Jardine was considered of more value to honest John Burton than all his worldly possessions, and he had a fair share of good things, too.

John was a farmer, and lived upon his own homestead, where his family had been freeholders for so many years that no one could remember any other name in connection with the old acres.

John did not pose for a gentleman, but he was one, nevertheless, in those vital points which are the very groundwork and backbone of such a being.

His education had been faulty, but his heart was of gold.

None of the Burtons had ever been men of letters, and in that Jack was no better than his forefathers; but there was the most gentle spirit in that colossal frame, and he was true and just in all his dealings.

He had inherited his property at a very early age, and even as a lad had managed it well.

His father had been killed upon his own land in a terrible fashion, having fallen from a hay-cart, impaled upon his own hay fork, which he had carelessly stuck into the load.

The shock of the death of the husband of her love brought on a stroke with Mrs. Bur-

ton, who lived to be a very precious burthen to her son John.

What John was to his mother only she knew. He was but the gentler with her for his own great strength. And what she was to John, only he could understand.

The outside world said how sad it was for Jack Burton to be left with a helpless mother upon his hands; but there was a halo about that mother's heart, which shed warmth and light upon his path in his darkest hours; for gloomy periods there are in every life, and John's was no exception to the rule.

John Burton, of Honour Oak Farm, was, however, not the only farmer in the neighbourhood. There was, of course, the end of his land, and then began that of Mr. Jardine, the father of pretty Clare, who was the very queen of coquettes, and who could not leave one male heart in peace.

There was no real harm in Clare Jardine; but she was young, foolish, and frivolous, and heard too much of her own beauty. Nor only so; she perfectly agreed with her admirers, and spent a great deal of valuable time before her mirror.

It took Clare ever so long to decide where a flower or a bow was most becoming. Even in childhood John took this girl into his heart. He couldn't see one fault in her. Her vanity he considered natural since she was so beautiful. Her wilful ways, pretty and amusing. Her idleness! Well, he said, no one could expect Clare to soil such delicate white fingers. So the girl came to be accepted at her own price, and at the still greater one which John put upon her, for the opinion of John Burton was thought a great deal of at Willowdene Farm.

Mr. Jardine, who was not much of a farmer himself, and a decidedly weak character, could not have got on at all without his young neighbour's judgment and friendly advice.

Mr. Jardine, now, was a gentleman born. He had blue blood in his veins, and could name titled personages as his kinsfolk, but not one of them had ever done for him one tithe of what John had done.

Mr. Jardine had been an officer, and had not been able to keep pace with his expenses, and had been compelled to sell out. His wife and friends thereupon persuaded him to purchase a farm and settle down in the country.

This he did, and but for John Burton he would have been ruined long ago, for, however much he might have known of soldiering, he certainly understood nothing of farming. As it was, he never could be broken of some of his amusing ways.

Like his daughter, he could not bear to soil or spoil his hands, and Mr. Jardine might be seen hoeing his potatoes in his old military buckskin gloves, which he kept for the purpose.

His family consisted of his wife, as good and sensible a woman as ever breathed—fortunately for him—a son who was eleven years of age when he came to Willowdene, and Clare, who was then ten.

Mr. Jardine had been a captain in the army, but sunk his rank with his debts in the service, and emerged from his military life plain Farmer Jardine, since which he had heard little or nothing of his sunshine friends, nor of his aristocratic relations.

They had been pleased to accept his invitations to those extremely pretty sights, military balls, but Willowdene Farm was altogether below their notice.

He had written to them at first telling them of his changed existence, and asking them to the farm; but he received no reply, and his letters were torn into very small fragments less curious domestics might piece them together; and the name of their now detrimental relation seldom, if ever, passed their lips. When it did so it was coupled with regret.

"Ah! poor Frank! He has come to grief!"

Nevertheless, it was some years before sorrow entered the home at Willowdene. It was the death of Mr. Burton, senior, which first drew the families together.

Mrs. Jardine went to them in their great trouble and endeared herself to both mother and son in her sympathetic kindness. This was when the Jardines were quite new at country life, and John soon saw how the kindness of Mrs. Jardine could be reciprocated, and from that time he became her husband's helper, adviser, and right hand.

Little Clare, with a child's keen appreciation of other people's sorrow, dimmed her forget-me-not eyes over that of John Burton, and from that moment he believed in her and was her slave. Clare's tears were soon over—veritable April showers were they; but the love which was then planted in John's heart was to last for ever. When the girl's laughter was rippling over again, and thought of his trouble had passed, he was sucking honey-like

comfort from these transient tear-drops, and he raised up a perfect ideal in his own fine mind, which he grew to worship, and believed Clare Jardine and the ideal to be one and the same being—she the reality, and the picture in his heart her reflection.

So it came about that there grew to be daily intercourse between Honour Oak Farm and Willowdene, and time went on till Clare was sixteen and John Burton seven-and-twenty, and in their constant meetings the two fell gradually into something very much like love-making.

In the young man's mind there was not one doubt how it was all to end. Clare would soon change her home from one farm to the other. She would be his wife—the darling of his heart, and would fill Honour Oak with sunshine.

On Clare's sixteenth birthday, or rather, upon the day when Clare was sixteen, he walked into Mr. Jardine's little den, which he called his study—not that he studied much, but so he styled it—and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Jardine," he said, in his honest, open fashion, "Clare is sixteen to-day! She is almost a woman!"

"Heaven bless me! Why, so she is!" he replied, coming out of a brown study in which he had been indulging regarding his son's future, about which the two differed in opinion. "Yes, Clare is sixteen, and a woman to look at. Still, she is only a child in years!"

"I cannot now feel her to be so, my friend, and she is growing older every day."

"There is no denying that," laughed the father.

"Well, Mr. Jardine, what I wanted to tell you, you have probably guessed long ago, and that is, I love your daughter with all my heart, and want you to know that I mean to try and win her for my wife!"

Mr. Jardine stretched out his hand to him. "There is no one I should like better for a son-in-law," he replied, heartily. "You have been like a member of my family so many years, that it will scarcely be a change; but Clare is too young to marry yet. Still, I have no objection to an engagement between you, if you win her; but I fancy she will need some winning, John. She is a wilful little lassie, and so I warn you. For myself, I always have looked upon you as a son; in fact, if the truth must be told, you have been of more comfort to me than my own boy. He has too much of my family about him, and will never, I fear, settle down to a quiet country life. Already he is beating himself against what he considers his cage. One of these days he will knock down the bars and off he will go. Since he won't be a farmer, what to make of him I don't know. He is bent on being an officer like his father before him, and if I had money I would not say nay to him; but, as it is, the thing is impossible. There is no balance at my bankers, dear boy, and without it Cecil must not become a soldier."

"If I could be of any service to you, sir," blurted out John Burton, flushing hotly. "I have capital in hand."

"Lucky dog, you Jack! But no," laughed the other, "the thing is not to be thought of, although I thank you all the same for your generous offer. By-the-bye, I shall not be able to give Clare anything, John. You understand that?"

"I had hoped you would say so, Mr. Jardine! There is something far more manly in a man's working for his own wife than to let her father or anyone else provide for her, and I should have been really troubled if you had wished to dower your daughter."

"I like your sentiments, Burton, and it is fortunate you hold them, for I find it all I can do to keep my head above water—and, to own the truth, I have a mortgage on the farm. It is hard to squeeze a living out of it, and, but for you, I should have come to grief long ago."

"It is very good of you to say that," answered John, while he stretched out his great sunburnt hand. "To hear you speak so indeed

gives me pleasure. You know I would do anything for you or yours, and you have only to tell me of any wish of your own, or those dear to you, and I would carry it out willingly. Although you said 'No' just now to my desire to help Cecil, perhaps you may come round to it. If a young fellow sets his mind on any one path of life, I fear he will settle to no other."

"There is something in what you say, my dear fellow, and if Cecil were not my own son, I should say let him enter the army and shift for himself. There are fellows who really do live on their pay, but they are few and far between, and were not born Jardines. I couldn't do it, nor do I suppose for one moment that he would do better than I did, although he assures me that if I will only start him far, I shall have no cause of complaint; but I see no reason for believing him, nor, in fact, have I the ready money at command."

"Let me start him," cried John, eagerly. "It would be just what I should like. That would ease your mind, and make Cecil happy, and Clare would, I know, like to have her brother an officer, dear little soul. She feels, of course, that she is above the country folks here; but I want her to understand that she will never find a heart, even under a red coat, beat more truly for her than John Burton's!"

"You never spoke a truer word, John," said Mr. Jardine, heartily. "Clare has a great hankering after soldiers, as you say, and I, too, loved the profession dearly; but I will say this, I never met a man so open, honest, and free from guile in the service as yourself! You are the best fellow I know, and I hope to live to see Clare very happy as your wife!"

"Thank you, Mr. Jardine. It won't be my fault if I don't win her. I think you know that she is dearer to me than all the world besides put together—except my mother. She stands alone. The two loves can in no wise clash or be compared. The one is bright sunshine, the other the soft, sweet, pale, peaceful moonlight. Clare will never grudge the love I give my dear mother, I feel sure!"

"Indeed, I should be ashamed of her if she did; but, John, although Clare is my own child, I must give you one piece of advice, don't be too great a slave to her. She is a wilful, wee woman. Still, she is young, very young, and you should be able to guide her to your way of thinking. If she loves you, she will calm down, of course."

"I don't want her altered," answered John, loyally. "I love her as she is, and have done so ever since her sweet heart grieved for my first great sorrow. That drew me to her, and no matter what Clare did now, she would ever be the same to me."

"You're a splendid fellow, John!" said Clare's father, as he regarded the tall figure with interest and affection. "Somehow, with your great frame and firm face, you make one think of you as a rock."

"Not flinty, I hope," laughed the other.

Mr. Jardine continued as if there had been no interruption.

"A rock to lean on, something secure and reliable—or do you hold that the word should be reliable, as some of the papers did some time since?"

"My dear sir, I have no opinion upon the subject of letters. I hold a very simple creed: I love Clare and my mother, consider a farmer's life the best in the world, and know Heaven is over us all. A man does not need much learning to comprehend that; and since my life falls in the lines I think the most pleasant, what would have been the use of my bothering my head with a lot of learning?"

"Not much, certainly," answered the other, with a smile; "but then you see, John, few men have so simple a faith, and fewer still are content with just the gods the gods provide for them. I don't fancy, somehow, that there is another John Burton."

"Well, I should be an ungrateful dog," answered John, "if I could be dissatisfied with my lot. And when once I get my little Clare home, I shall not know how to be happy enough."

"I hope she will never disappoint you, Jack," said Mr. Jardine, reflectively. "It seems to me a woman to satisfy a great love like yours should be cast in a very perfect mould. My little girl is uncertain, coy, and hard to please! A very Phyllis!"

"Yes! In one thing," laughed the other, "she is, I admit. She is my 'only joy,' but the words of the song suit her no farther. My darling couldn't be 'faithless as the wind or sea.'"

Mr. Jardine gave a slight, impatient sigh. He had lived with Clare, and although dotingly fond of her, and proud of her beauty, yet, nevertheless, he constantly had unpleasant experiences of her wilfulness and perversity, which made him a little uncertain as to her future, and uneasy concerning it; but, as he looked at the young farmer before him, he thought that if anything could make his little Clare a wiser, more stable character, it would be such a love as that of honest John Burton.

CHAPTER II.

It was a glorious hay-making season, and for once farmers forgot to grumble.

John Burton was as busy as busy could be, for not only had he his own men all at work, but he was equally anxious that the splendid crop should be gathered in at Willowdene Farm as upon his own meadows; in fact, rather more so, for he knew that he could afford to make losses better than Mr. Jardine could.

There had not been a shower yet upon the fragrant dried grass, but black clouds were gathering in the distance, and, after an examination of the sky in a very weather-wise fashion, John took some of his men with him over to Willowdene.

"We have come to finish up your field, Mr. Jardine," he said, in his bluff matter-of-fact way. "When once the weather breaks, it will give us a doing. It is your last meadow, and it seems a pity you should not get all the hay in, since you have done so well with it so far. You see, as I advised you when to start, I feel a bit responsible."

"Your advice was good. We have it all under cover with the exception of this."

"Well, we will soon have that in. Start to it, my lads, and rick it all before you turn another fork for me."

The men knew their master and were fond of him, and there was no grumbling at being taken off one job to finish another. They went cheerfully to their work, and John flung off his coat to go and assist them.

"But the rain will be down on your own hay, John," said Mr. Jardine, doubtfully.

"I have plenty in," answered John, as he began to move forward, fork in hand; but there was the "frou frou" of a woman's skirts, and he stopped short with a smile, and turned towards it.

"I saw you from the window," cried Clara, as she tripped along, one of the prettiest pictures of girlish beauty which the world could produce.

She was dressed in a fashionable costume of a delicate cream colour, with a mass of rich-hued crimson ribbons upon her left shoulder, and a rose to match at her throat, fastened in with a plain gold brooch, and she carried a white broad-brimmed sun-hat, by a crimson string, the hat being trimmed with masses of soft lace and crimson roses.

"I saw you from the window, John," she cried, "and know what you're about. You are going to finish dad's hay, and I am coming to help you;" and as she spoke, she tied the crimson strings of her hat under her wealth of golden hair, seized upon her father's gloves and hay fork, and announced herself ready.

"But I am going to work, also, Clara!" objected Mr. Jardine; "pray, leave me my things!"

Clara was dancing away into the meadow by John's side, and only laughed back over her shoulder at him.

"You can get some more, dad," and she was gone.

"A lot of work Clara will do!" he grumbled, as he turned homewards to fetch a

second fork, "and she will spoil her new dress into the bargain."

If Clara did not do any work she did a great deal of play, and looked sweetly pretty as she peeped with a pair of saucy blue eyes from under the broad-brimmed hat, her golden hair glistening in the sunshine upon her white brow, the rose-bud mouth open in a sunny smile, and showing a dimple in her pink cheek, and a set of pearly teeth.

"Now, John, are you ready?" she asked, in a silvery voice. "I am quite!" and lifting a forkful of hay, she smothered him with it, ruthlessly, then another and another, and her laughter rang out merrily, as she darted away from the innocent handful with which he returned the compliment; then seeing her father advancing she served him the same trick.

He did not accept it with John's good humour.

"Don't, Clara! Do you call that working?"

"Yes, dad, working you up!" she laughed.

"I won't have you make me ridiculous before the men!" he returned, crossly. "Set to work, or go in!"

Clara made a *move*, and there was rebellion in the toss of her golden head.

"Mr. Burton," she said, do run indoors and get me my book and parasol, and I'll sit in the hay and look at you make it!" and the bright eyes gazed full into his, and made his honest heart flutter beneath his ribs.

"To be sure I will, Clara," he answered, coming very near to her, "on one condition!"

"What is that?" she asked.

"Call me John!"

"Won't Jack do?" she inquired, wickedly.

"Oh! excellently; but Mr. Burton is so stiff!"

"I quite agree with you!" she laughed with double meaning.

"If I were John, I'd have nothing to do with you!" remarked her father.

"I can fully believe that," she continued, merrily; "but you see you're not!"

"Clara, you're a torment!"

"People always have said, father, that there is a strong family likeness between us, morally and physically."

"You had better give in!" said John Burton.

"Miss Clara will have the last word!"

"Why, certainly, I respect the old woman who said scissors to the latest breath, and used her fingers to impress her feelings when she could speak no more!"

"It takes a good deal to stop a woman's tongue!" growled Mr. Jardine, as he began to toss the hay with more than his usual activity, for a little temper steam adds to a man's energy or to a woman's either.

"You would hardly wish to stop those in your house, Mr. Jardine. Mrs. Jardine speaks well, it is a pleasure to listen to her sound, sensible remarks!"

"And Clara?" asked the father, as he left off his work suddenly and regarded the young man with amusement, "can you say the same of her?"

"Clara is Clara," answered the other, with a beam of light which shot from his true grey eyes and rested upon the woman he loved, "and she is perfect in my opinion!"

"Bravo, Jack!" cried the girl, as she patted him on the shoulder, as though he had been a faithful retriever. "Very prettily said! I'll remember that in your favour. Now for my book and parasol. I shall get freckled!"

"What if you do, Clara? A golden freckle or two shows up the fairness of the skin, and is not unbecoming!"

"I don't want a bran bag shaken over me!" she laughed, as he went away to do her bidding.

Mr. Jardine stopped again, and rested upon his fork, with a serious expression of face.

"Clara, you are so nearly a woman, now, that I want to see you more thoughtful. What were pretty ways in a child, and unobjectionable, are a mistake, to say the least of them, in a girl of your age!"

"What awful thing have I done now, dad?" she inquired, with meek humility.

"You treat John Burton with—"

"Well?"

"I really don't know how to express myself!"

"Then I am afraid I cannot assist you."

"What I mean is this, Clara; John loves you with all his heart, and you—well, you play football with it—there!"

"Has Mr. Burton complained of my treatment?" she asked, with defiance in the mutinous blue eyes.

"Not he! He is content in his fool's paradise. He believes in you, and thinks you care for him in return. It is my duty, my dear, to ask for the truth. Do you or do you not mean to marry the man when you grow older?"

"When I grow older I may have the sense to answer you, my wise sire! For the present I only want to enjoy myself," she laughed.

"Then you should tell the man you don't want him, and you mean nothing serious. If he then likes to be your friend, he will have his eyes open."

"But I do want him. How am I to enjoy myself without Jack?" she asked, quaintly. "Here he is; let him answer you. Mr. Burton, could I enjoy myself without you, do you think?" and she looked at him teasingly.

"I know one thing, lassie, I cannot enjoy myself without you, and I hope sometime I may add to your pleasure. You are well aware I would if I could, Clara. Let me make a throne for my little queen. There, queenie! let me help you, and he stretched out his two strong brown hands to assist her.

She clasped them, and her own small white ones made such a vivid contrast to his that she laughed outright.

"Look on this picture, and look on that!"

"Yes!" he replied, "dear little ivory fingers and great brown paws."

"What makes them so brown?" she asked.

"Work," he answered.

"But papa's are not like yours."

John Burton laughed outright.

"No, lassie, dear, you are right. The difference is just this: I was born a thoroughbred farmer, and Mr. Jardine a thoroughbred gentleman. You must never expect me to be like a man who has had a fine education and mixed with the best society."

Clara sighed.

"Ah! that is just what I want to do—get out of this wretched little narrow groove, and see life. I don't wonder Cecil wishes to be a soldier. I should love him to be!"

"Should you, dear? Then he shall be if I can persuade my father."

"You'll never succeed. Father can't afford it. So Cecil and I must pine for a better life."

"Clara," said John Burton, very earnestly, "you would not find it a better life, my dear. It might dazzle you at first, perhaps, but you would tire of it, and in your best moods long to be back under the green trees of Willowdene, with the blue arch of heaven above, and the lark singing overhead, and the sweet hay in the fields, and honest folk around who love you with all their hearts. It is a better, truer life than you would get in a town."

"Jack! you are becoming quite an orator, and there is a touch of rough poetry in your description," she said, approvingly.

"Very rough, I am afraid. Come, little one, this won't do, the clouds are still in the sky. I must work first and earn my pleasure. When your father's hay is in I shall feel I may indulge in some more chit-chat," and he placed her gently upon the hay mound and moved away.

"Very well, Mr. Burton, that is half the good score off for the pretty speech; you are retrograding. Fancy you thinking more of the hay than me!"

"Fancy your thinking more of folly than sense!" answered Mr. Jardine, crossly. "John is right in every word he has said!"

"Oh, dear! I don't like tris," retorted the girl. "I'll read, I don't want to talk any more"; and Clare was soon absorbed in a love story, which suited her taste altogether, with a peer of the realm for a hero instead of an unpolished farmer, and how she wished such a man would come her way. Foolish, unwise girl-woman! for the very man whose description made her young heart palpitate was an unprincipled heartless fellow, and John Burton was honest and true. It is not always that the best metal has received the brightest polish, and so Clare found in after years.

John glanced at the graceful little figure from time to time, for Clare had promised to look at him at his work, but she was altogether engrossed by the peer and his passionate love-making.

He felt a shade of disappointment settle upon his heart and contract it, but his own sunny nature soon dispersed the cloud, and he made excuses for his darling, and smiled to see her so enjoying her book.

There was little of self in John Burton. Time passed quickly out there in the sunshine, with the busy forks at work; and the meadow of sweet hay was soon away in the rick-yard, and stacked.

By then there was every sign of rain, but Clare still sat reading under the tree.

Mrs. Jardine went out into the yard, and clasped John's hand.

"We have to thank you for this," she said, gratefully. "What should we do without all your help? You are more than a son to us."

"It is pleasant to hear you say that," he answered, with a rich inflection in his mellow voice. "The little assistance I can give you will always be yours, and given with all my heart."

"I know it, John. You are a dear good fellow. Where is Clare?"

"I am going to her. She is reading in the meadow."

"Come in to tea when you are ready; I won't make it till you return," she answered, with a smile. "I don't believe in the sennalike brew which some people call tea."

"I believe in yours, it is always good," he replied, as he passed, with a smile, towards the meadow, stopping to pick up his clean holland coat which lay upon the grass.

Clare was so absorbed with her book, that she never heard him, until he stooped over her, and touched her gently upon her shoulder.

"You're a horror, Jack!" she gasped. "Oh! why did you stop me? I was at such an interesting place. You can't think how much he was in love with her!"

He slipped upon the hay-mound beside Clare.

"And you cannot think how I love you, darling. Does not truth and reality please you as much as fiction?"

"Ah! but he was a lord."

"And I am only a farmer."

"And he was so handsome."

"And I am so plain! Never mind, sweetheart, no lord in any romance could love more faithfully than I do, and will ever love you. And there is no wish of yours, my pet, that I will not gratify at all times. You will only have to place those two dear arms about my neck, and say, 'Do it for my sake, John,' and it shall be done."

"No, I should say Jack. I won't call you John," she replied, perversely. "But, oh! Jack, fancy being made love to by a man in his shirt-sleeves! Why do you do such things?"

"The lord in that tale wore a frock coat, no doubt, to go hay-making in," he laughed, "and a white waistcoat, patent polished boots, lavender kid gloves, and a top hat."

"Nonsense! he never went hay-making at all; he made love, which was far nicer."

"I quite agree with you. See, darling, my coat will come in useful now. What great drops are falling; it will protect your pretty frock from the rain."

"What an ugly coat," she murmured.

"Handsome is as handsome does, lassie. It is cool and comfortable, and it will turn the shower for my little girl."

"If it is going to rain, Jack, we had better go in."

"Yes! when it is over."

"It may not be over for ages."

"I am weather-wise, Clare. There will be a shower, then sunshine for a short time, after which we may expect a real storm. I will take care of you, lassie, but I am not going to be stopped any more. Clare, dear, I have made up my mind to speak to you to-night," and he laid his hand firmly upon hers. "You know what I have to say, Pet; still every man has to put his feelings into words, and ask the woman he loves to be his wife. I know you are very young, darling, but no one is too young to be happy, and, little one, only promise me that it shall be so, and I will wait patiently as long as you please."

"And suppose I don't promise?"

"I can't suppose it, Clare. All the thoughts of my future have been so mixed with thoughts of you that I should feel absolutely lost and at sea."

"Some people like being at sea. I think I should!" she answered.

He caught her in his arms.

"Don't torment me, little love—my pretty flower, my darling meadow-sweet—say one kind word and make me happy!"

"One kind word!" she repeated, wickedly. "What! won't that do? Some folks never are satisfied!"

"Clare, you know what I mean!"

"Yes! I know what you mean."

"Well, dear?"

"Well?"

"What is your answer, Clare? Are we to be friends?"

"Friends! Why, of course!"

"No; I do not mean just that, dear. I could not live near you without the hope that you will be my wife—understand that, my pet?"

"Well, you may hope, Jack. I do not object to that, and some day—some day—"

"Yes! little love. Some day you will be my wife!" he broke in, eagerly.

"I never said that, you great hasty thing! Perhaps I shall never make up my mind to it."

"Clare, if I thought that, I couldn't live at the old farm so near. It would be hard to go, but I should do it."

"And what would become of father, and Willowdene? And who would help Cecil into the Army?"

"Some of your other friends, I suppose, dear," he answered, in all humility.

"I don't know where they are!" she replied, with bitterness. "Jack, I don't believe we have one in the world except yourself—so don't let us split straws. We are all very fond of you, you know, and we can't afford to lose you in any way. There! will that satisfy you, dear?"

"Little love, would you care if I went away? Answer me that with truth!" and he looked deep down into her soul's windows for the reply of eyes as well as lips.

"Yes, Jack, I should care."

He caught her to his breast and rained kisses upon her sweet flushed face.

"Oh, Jack! How can you? I never gave you leave," she cried.

"Well, I am glad you have settled it!" exclaimed Cecil, as he came round the tree trunk. "I don't want to spoil sport. I only brought a waterproof; the pater was afraid you would spoil your dress, for it is not paid for yet. However, that will be John's de-

partment soon, and I hope he will appreciate the millinery bills better than dad does; they are thorns in the flesh to him. I wish you both joy. You have chosen a pretty little girl for a wife, old man, and Clare will be well taken care of, I know"; and, shaking John warmly by the hand, he was gone, leaving the waterproof for Clare's benefit, which John wrapped carefully round her, and put on his much-despised coat.

"Oh, Jack," she whispered, "how unfortunate Cecil coming!"

"Not at all, darling. I am not ashamed of my love for you."

"But they will think we are engaged."

"Let them, sweetheart, and let us think so too. It will be much the happier for us both."

"But I don't think I can, Jack. I never meant that, you know. You shouldn't have kissed me, indeed."

"I don't regret it, Clare," he laughed, "not one little bit. See, even the sun is laughing, dear. Let us run home while we may. Five minutes more and there will be a storm."

He drew her hand through his arm and hurried her along.

"When it does come it will be heavy," he said. "I am glad your father's hay is in and the cloth over the rick."

"And yours is not."

"Never mind that, sweet. I shall love that meadow, Clare, so long as I live. See your parents are waiting for us."

And so they were, with outstretched hands.

"John, I am very glad," exclaimed Mr. Jardine, while he squeezed the young man's fingers with most cordial warmth, and Mrs. Jardine placed her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"How glad your mother will be to have Clare for a daughter, John," she said, smiling at him affectionately; "as pleased as I am to have you for a son."

And she led him in to the dining-room to tea; and everyone was very happy, except Clare, who was not at all certain that she meant to accept John at all, but was carried along by the current of events.

So it came about that bright, fitful, golden-haired Clare Jardine was actually betrothed to honest John Burton, without having much voice in the matter; and as she was brushing out her sunny tresses in the moonlight that night, she was wondering deeply whether she was glad or sorry.

Her mother entered her room.

"Clare, dear," she said, softly, "I want to tell you how very glad I am. You are a fortunate girl; John is altogether honest and good."

"Oh, yes," answered she, with a little shivering sigh; "I know he is good—very good, but—"

"But what, my child?"

"Nothing, mother, nothing. I know quite well that Jack is as good as gold. Good-night, mother, good-night."

And what Clare really felt was just this. She had formed an ideal lover upon the fictions she had read, and he was not in the least like John Burton. This was the thought which troubled her.

CHAPTER III.

Clare Jardine did not seem to have much reason to regret her engagement. John Burton simply idolised her, and even her fitful nature appeared to be satisfied.

About a week after the day of the hay-making he came over to Willowdene, and asked her to go for a drive with him. Clare was fond of open-air exercise, and accepted at once.

The day was cloudless.

John's hay was safely in, and he was beginning to think of his corn crops.

Mrs. Burton never left the house. It was all she could do to get from room to room, but she had written a letter of loving welcome to

the girl whom her adored son had chosen for his wife. Nor did she wonder at his choice, for Clare was a fresh, sweet young rosebud, and she herself loved her, although in her heart of hearts there was just one shade of anxiety as to what Clare would be when her pretty ways were things of the past.

What is to be admired, or, at any rate, not condemned in a child, or very young creature, would not be tolerated in a person of greater age; and Mrs. Burton feared just a little that Clare's wilfulness might deepen into obstinacy, and sadden her son. Still she thought, in her proud, motherly heart, that such love as her John's must win any woman to try to be altogether good.

Clare had received the letter, but she had not replied to it, nor could her mother persuade her to do so.

"No, mamma, I am not going to make rash promises, and vow all sorts of things I don't feel, just to satisfy the old dame's vanity of her son," she objected.

"But, my dear, you must mean to be a good wife to John, and daughter to herself, so why not please her by saying so?"

"I hate to be good," she announced, crossly; "and that is the best of John, he never wants me to be so."

"I thought you never meant to call him John, Clare?"

"I suppose I may call him what I like," she pouted.

Mrs. Jardine never took any notice of her moods, feeling sure that opposition only strengthened them.

"Well, I must write to Mrs. Burton myself," she said, "or go and see her; perhaps that will be better, we can talk matters over."

"Ah! I see you are going to be a sort of godmother, and promise all kinds of things in my name."

"We all require godmothers, my dear," said Mrs. Jardine, with a smile, "and I will do my best to satisfy Mrs. Burton concerning you."

Clare leant back in her chair and yawned.

"That's all right then, mater; you can say just what you like, as long as you don't bother me."

So Mrs. Jardine walked over to Honour Oak Farm, and the two mothers talked of the prospects of their children, and Mrs. Burton was satisfied to accept the little sight, and said not a word to her son concerning it, although she wished in her heart of hearts that Clare had come herself or written.

When John was starting to take Clare out he asked his mother whether she had heard from his darling, and he grew a shade graver when she answered him in the negative.

"Clare does not like letter-writing," he said, apologetically; "but she will be here to see you before long, dear."

"I hope so, I shall be very glad to welcome her. I want her to love me very much, my boy, for your sake if not for my own."

"Of course, she will love you for your own, mother mine; who could live in the house with you and see your patience, gentleness, and sweet ways, and not do so," answered the son, warmly.

Mrs. Burton held out her thin hand, and clasped the strong sunburnt one.

"John, dear, ought I to live here to be a burthen to you?" she asked, in faltering accents.

"Why, my dear, where else should you live? This is your own home. You were here before I was, and have the best right to it of anyone."

"You always were kind, John; but suppose your wife did not like it, and thought me a bother?"

"I can't suppose it, mother," he answered, gravely. "I love Clare because she is good and beautiful, and my judgment could not so err. Come, dear old mother, don't make troubles. Clare will love you as dearly as I do, and, please heaven, you will hear the

voices of our children blessing their 'gran' as the years roll on. Have no fear, my dear old soul, we shall be very happy together in our dear home!"

"I hope so, my boy!"

"Mother you are not vexed with Clare for not writing? I know she is a lazy little kitten, but then that is just it. She is still a kitten, and full of her playful tricks; and somehow, dear, I like her so, and never want her to become an 'old cat!'"

"Oh! of course you don't, John dear. Clare is a very pretty young thing, and I don't wonder at your love for her."

"And you are not vexed about the letter?"

"Not in the least. Dismiss such an idea from your mind. Are you going to Willowdene? Then give my love to them all."

The big burly man stooped and kissed the frail invalid, and went out with a contented smile upon his manly face.

Clare was soon ready for her drive, and the two started for a distant wood, which Clare was wishing to see in its midsummer beauty.

There was just a refreshing breeze to make it pleasant, and the sun shone brightly in a blue sky.

The birds were singing overhead in a joyous chorus. The hedges were sweet with the climbing honeysuckle, and "travellers' joy" had worked its web-like branches and tendrils around trees and bushes in a wonderfully graceful tangle, while the great green leaves of the briony hung in garlands, and long trailing branches of the star-like blossoms of the dog-rose were festooned among the lanes with nature's own true grace beyond the power of human hand to imitate.

"Oh, Jack, how lovely it is!" murmured Clare, as they whirled along between the flower-clad hedges, with the forest trees kissing overhead, and the banks green with ferns, ivy, and moss.

His arm encircled her.

"I am so glad you love the country, Clare, and do not want to go in for town life."

"Simply because I can't get it, Jack! Why, if I say I like the country, it is simply because the country is my fate, and the town grapes are therefore sour! But, if I confess the truth, I pine for men and cities; and I want to go to balls and theatres as my parents did before me. Is it very wonderful that I should do so, Jack, that you look as if you had seen your own ghost, or been asked to undertake at your own funeral? I do hope you don't mean to wet-blanket me, Jack. If you object to high spirits, you know, it is not too late to say so."

"My darling, it is much too late. We belong to each other now," he answered, seriously.

"Oh! in a way," she laughed; "but until the golden circle winds a woman's finger there is plenty of time."

"Not to my mind, dearest. It is love which binds heart to heart, not the wedding-ring. That has been made needful by the fickleness of men and women. But, child, love was meant for a lifetime—it was not intended to change nor to fade."

"No, I suppose not, my serious old man; but what can folks do if they find they have made rash promises, which become a burden to them? Such vows are better kept in the breach than the observance."

"I think not, dear. Vows are made for the next world, not for this only. If people would only not nurse their new fancies, there would be less trouble in the world."

"There is plenty anyway," sighed this child of the sunshine, who did not know what trouble was even.

John Burton laughed outright.

"I hope, little woman, you will never know more than you have done in your peaceful life at Willowdene."

"Oh! that is all very well for you to say, Jack; but, of course, I have had as many worries as most people," she answered, crossly.

"No doubt, pet. I have heard that children's troubles are keen, if short-lived."

"But I am not a child!"

"No, you are a sweet child-woman—the most beautiful thing out, Clare. Come, don't sulk, dearie, your old Jack did not mean to offend."

But Clare was cross and took no notice.

They entered the wood.

It struck so cool and refreshing, with its solemn dark aisles like a natural cathedral, giving a grand and impressive feeling to the mind.

"Is it not splendid, dear?" he asked, pulling up his horse for Clare to look down several avenues which branched out from the spot where they stood. "I call those three-hundred-years-old beeches quite perfect."

Before the girl could answer, the horse swerved violently, and by a sudden movement shied right off the roadway down a steep bank, falling heavily to the ground; and the trap being a two-wheeled one, both Clare and John Burton were thrown out.

The former was more frightened than hurt, the latter more hurt than frightened.

John had struck his head against a tree-trunk, one of the very trees he had admired so much, and was quite insensible.

Clare's cries rent the air, and a gentleman rushed up to her assistance.

"I am afraid my friends and I are responsible for this accident. We have a picnic going on behind the bushes, and your horse was alarmed. We will render you what assistance we can, and are sorry to have caused so much trouble. Are you hurt?" and he knelt down beside her on the grass, while two or three other gentlemen busied themselves with John Burton and his horse.

The latter was soon on his legs again, snorting in a terrified fashion; but the shafts had snapped like carrots, as they could scarcely fail to do.

Clare looked up shyly at the new comer, who was ready to help her, and blushed hotly, for kneeling before her was the ideal man she had pictured in her day dreams—the prince out of the fairy tale, whom she had from childhood hoped to see.

He was leaning over her with such a look of tender interest, that her foolish little heart went pit-a-pat at a very unreasonable pace.

He was olive-skinned, and burnt to a rich warm brown by tropical sunshine. His hair was dark and closely cropped. His moustache was almost black, and thick and large—and his eye-lashes were the same colour, and when he raised them you felt a decided surprise, for the eyes which met your own were blue as the summer heavens and full of a strange, mischievous light.

"Are you hurt?" repeated he. "I hope not, indeed."

"I hardly know," she murmured. "I feel—"

"Yes, I know—knocked into next week," he broke in sympathetically. "Never mind, let me help you up, and we will get you a glass of champagne—it is the best thing I know to cure real pain."

He rose from his knees as he spoke, and held out both his hands to her, and she saw what a tall, fine-looking fellow he was, well and elegantly made.

She let him take her hands, and he lifted her as if she were a feather-weight.

"There! that is better now. How are you, little one?" and he smiled down upon her with interest. "You are shaken, I fear!"

"I am afraid it is worse than that. I have hurt my ankle!"

"Take my arm, and try and walk. You will then ascertain the extent of the damage!"

She obeyed him, and evidently not without pleasure.

"There! you get on nicely, I think, don't you?" he said, cheerfully.

"Not very well!"

"It is not far to the champagne!" he laughed.

Clare's eyes turned to the prostrate form of John Burton.

"Your brother?" inquired the stranger. Clare flushed.

"No, our neighbour, Mr. Burton. Is he much hurt?"

"Oh! I hope not, the grass is soft. My friends will soon get him round. The Colonel has a brandy-flask, I know. He never goes without it, on principle!"

Clare hesitated.

"Ought we not to try and help him?"

"Yes, if it is anything tender," he replied, quizzically; "if not, he is in good hands, and you are better out of the way; and besides, I selected you for my care, you see, and I want to look after you properly. Does the little ankle hurt much, now?"

"Yes, it is very painful!"

He pressed his arm about her.

"There! that will help you more. Don't mind me, child. Think of me as an uncle or grandfather!"

She looked up into the handsome face and laughed merrily, notwithstanding her pain.

"That is ever so much better!" he said, approvingly. "Trust to your father, and he will pull you through, here! you shall have the cosy place in this tree-trunk, which I had arranged for myself, and here is a basket for your foot-stool. What dear little feet, small woman! it is a shame they should have to suffer. Now for some fix! Take a long draught, and pain and sadness vanish with the froth. Come, you look pounds better. We will repeat the dose in a few minutes. In the meantime, tell me the extent of your troubles. Are you far from home?"

"At least eight miles."

"And the shafts are broken!"

"Oh, dear! how are we to get back?"

"Did I not tell you to trust to your father?"

"Have you undertaken that office?" she laughed.

"Undoubtedly!"

"Oh! very well; and may I ask any questions?"

"Not one! but I will tell you how I am going to manage for you. We drove here in my tandem, and I will take you home with your horse as leader, and bring the trap back with a single horse."

"In the meantime, my friends will have one horse and a broken trap to look after. It is not far into the town, and they will manage it all right, I feel sure. Your neighbour can instruct his coach-maker to come to our hotel for it. There! has not your father planned the campaign nicely for you? And in return I shall expect you to promise to be my friend. I have taken quite a fancy to a certain pretty face not a hundred miles away."

Clare blushed with pleasure, but did not reply.

"Come, you must not be shy with me, you know," he laughed. "The relationship between us forbids it. Now, I want some memento of this merry meeting. What will you give me? Ah! I spy some forget-me-nots in that dainty hat, and I shall claim a spray in payment for my services. Quick, little woman, your friend and neighbour is being resurrected. They are getting him on his legs again, and he may tell tales!"

Clare hesitated, but he pressed the hat, which was lying beside her, into her fingers, and helped her to pull out some of the flowers.

"Give them to me of your own free will, pretty one," she whispered; and almost mechanically she obeyed him. "I knew you would," he continued, tenderly. "You are a dear little thing! I was sure of it the moment I saw you. We shall be real good friends. Now tell me your name and address."

"My name is Jardine."

"A good name, too; but what comes before it?"

"Clare."

"Clare Jardine. It sounds soft and sweet."

"We live at 'Willowdene,' and Mr. Burton is the owner of 'Honour Oak Farm.' Do you think he is really better?"

"Are you greatly interested?" inquired the

stranger, in a tone so quizzical that Clare did not like it.

"Of course not. Why should I be?"

"Ah! I can't say. That is best known to yourself."

"If anyone is ill or hurt, of course one ought to think about them, and help them, if possible."

"That is just what I thought when I saw you shot out of the dog-cart, small soul. And as you wish it so much, I will take you over to see the other sufferer, who, no doubt, will be glad of a pick-me-up in the shape of some champagne," and he began to put the forget-me-not in his button-hole.

"Oh! don't do that," said Clare, nervously.

"Why not?"

"It is artificial, and anyone can see it came out of my hat."

"Why should they not?"

"Simply because I object to it"; and there was an ominous tapping of the little foot as she spoke.

He removed it with readiness, and smiled as he laid the flower in his pocket-book.

"A beautiful woman's wish is always my law," he said, politely, "Still, I am sorry to crush my treasure."

Clare looked pleased.

"Thank you," she answered, quite softly; "and now we had better go over to Mr. Burton. He is looking for me."

"Are you in leading-strings, Miss Jardine?"

"Not I. I shall never be that to anyone."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Then you have not been in love?"

"No, never."

"Ah! what a pleasure it will be for the lucky fellow who turns back the fragrant leaves of so sweet a rose-bud, and looks down into its young fresh heart," he said, low, in a tender voice; and Clare's pulses fluttered at his words and tone, even though she hurried on towards the man to whom she was pledged. And the stranger beside her saw the wild-rose bloom flush her fair cheeks, and he determined even then to be the lucky man, if he found it possible; and, remembering many past conquests with a smile, while he shut out from his mind what he should have recollected, he told himself that there was no need whatever to despair of winning the love of a little country maiden like Clare Jardine, since she had so very decidedly taken his fancy.

CHAPTER IV.

John Burton's first conscious thought was for his sweetheart, and, having satisfied himself that she was safe and unhurt, he shook himself together and did his best to be cheerful; but he was not all right, for he still felt dazed and stupid, although no bones were broken, and the only real injury seemed to be his having fallen upon his left arm, which he had raised to save his face.

He accepted the champagne gratefully, and fell into the arrangement which Clare's new friend had made, without a murmur, and one of the other gentlemen volunteered to mount the back seat with him lest he should feel queer upon the way.

It was therefore not long before they started. The stranger was anxious to drop John at Honour Oak Farm, but notwithstanding the fact that he really felt ill and shaken, nothing would induce him to stop by the way, for he determined to see his darling safe beneath her father's roof-tree before he left her.

When the tandem dashed up the drive Mr. Jardine looked out of his sanctum window, and, seeing his daughter beside a stranger, went out at once to find out what it all meant.

He was very sorry to hear of the accident, which Clare explained in a few words, but he was most grieved to learn that his favourite, John Burton, had been hurt; and calling his wife to do the honours to their guests, he offered to drive John home lest the sight of strangers should alarm the invalid mother.

Mrs. Jardine summoned her son, and having left her children in charge of their two new friends, she went away to get them some refreshment.

Cecil soon fell into talking of horses and races with Captain Mayling, and took him round to the stable to inspect the few beasts they possessed.

"How pretty your garden is," said Clare's ideal. "Will you take me to see it, and give me a flower which I may wear in my button-hole? since the one I have is only a relic."

"Yes, we will go if you like," answered the girl; "just a little way, I cannot walk far."

"As soon as we are gone you must bind your ankle with arnica and water, Miss Jardine; it is the best thing I know for a sprain."

"Very well, I will."

"In the meanwhile let me help you," saying which he took her hand and drew it through his arm, and they sauntered out of the French window down the path to a summer-house, which was covered with roses and sweet-smelling jasmine.

"What a pretty bower!" he said.

"Yes, quite fit for the fairies!" he laughed.

"Quite so. Just suited to you!"

"I am afraid you are fond of paying compliments, Mr.—Mr.—why, we seem to know one another so well, and yet I have not heard your name!"

"Call me Eric," he replied.

"No, I can't do that."

"What, don't you like the name?"

"Yes, very much."

"Ah! I see, you are going to be conventional, and if you are, it will spoil our friendship, for, you see, we were never meant to be so, or we should not have been thrown together as we were, without an introduction! It is just the fact of its all being something out of the way and unusual which makes me sure we shall be real friends, and that we shall find such friendship very sweet. We know each other better in these two hours, Clare, than we should have done in a year of drawing-room meetings. You see, I have called you by your Christian name, although you will not call me by mine."

"Oh! if I were to do so, what would my father and mother think? It is impossible, and surely your knowledge of the world must tell you so!"

He laughed merrily.

"My dear child, who ever thought of such a thing! That, too, would spoil the charm of it. The pleasure would be to be just Clare and Eric to each other, and for no one else to guess our secret—our compact of friendship. Come, I see you are beginning to understand. There is the light of intelligence in your forget-me-not eyes."

"Oh! but really I don't think I could; and you must tell me your name."

"Why, certainly! I must introduce myself. Miss Clare Jardine, Sir Eric Du Val. Sir Eric Du Val, Miss Clare Jardine. Shall I, like the tradesmen, present you with my card, to make sure you don't forget, and let me say your esteemed orders shall have my earliest attention!"

And, drawing out his card-case, he gave the slip of cardboard to his companion, who, having glanced at it, slipped it into her pocket.

"There! are you better satisfied now, dear little woman?"

"So you are in the army," she said. "My brother Cecil wishes to join so much, and perhaps he will, after all; but papa had said 'no' to it."

"And why has he changed his mind?"

"I can't very well tell you," she stammered.

"Oh! all right. I am not inquisitive. Don't betray family secrets to please me," he laughed. "He is a fine-looking young fellow, and would make a smart soldier. If he is to be one of us, I must give him some hints as to the best regiments to enter."

"Thank you, I think he knows about all that, for father was in the army too. He

will like to have a talk with you when he returns."

"Will that be soon? Then let us rest in that charming summer-house. I don't want to add to your lameness by walking too much with me. There! that is a cosy corner for you, small soul. Do you feel any the worse for your fall to-day, besides the poor ankle?"

"No, I think not, thank you."

"That sounds cheery. Now, Clare, how, when, and where are we to meet again?"

"I—I don't know."

"Don't you care to see me any more?"

"I—yes, I think I do," she answered, archly. "You see, you have been very kind."

"I don't want to know the reason; I am satisfied with the assurance. And I most certainly want to see you, so we must manage it somehow. I suppose I had better make a friend of your father?"

"I suppose that will be best," she answered dubiously; "but papa won't ask you unless he takes to you."

"Oh, he must take to me. I must make myself agreeable, and, besides, there is always a certain amount of freemasonry between old soldiers. We will make friends over his son's prospects. We shall get on all right."

"I hope so."

"I am on long leave now, and can get rooms somewhere in the neighbourhood. Perhaps he can advise me upon the subject. Little Clare, I am not going farther away from you than I can help; you are such a bonny wee thing. I want to know you better, and to make you like me very, very much."

She looked shyly down upon the beautiful diamond hoop which encircled her finger, and the guard beside it, upon which was engraven the word "Mizpah," and turned the letters out of sight.

"I am sure we shall be very good friends," she murmured, "and I hope we shall meet again."

"We will!" he answered, with determination. "I am more obliged to your friend Mr. Burton's horse than I can tell you. By-the-by, that great, big, rough fellow is spoons on you, little Clare; don't be too kind to him, or he may mistake the situation. He was a faithful watchdog; he felt mortal bad, I know, but he wouldn't let us take you home."

"Poor old John!" she murmured, with a sigh.

"Ah! so you call him by his Christian name?"

"Of course, I have known him since I was a tiny child."

"You are not very big now, little one. So you don't really care for Farmer Burton? He looks every inch what he is, does he not?"

She was saved from being obliged to answer, by advancing footsteps; but, before they arrived, Sir Eric Du Val had clasped her hand in his and raised it to his lips with a sudden movement; then stood aside, admiring the star-like jasmine, while Clare's whole being thrilled with the first fresh pulse of love.

She was too happy, and yet too miserable, to move or speak; and the other three joined in conversation, which reached her ears, but not her mind.

She knew that the prince in the fairy tale of her life had come, and, young as she was, it was too late, for she had given her promise to another; and this knowledge caused her to feel deep joy and pain.

Surely this prince loved her, as she loved him, at first sight.

If she had not let herself be engaged to John Burton, might she not have been Lady Du Val, and have had the gay life which she believed she should like so much—that life of glitter for which the young spirit pined so foolishly?

Clare was too dazed by her new-born feelings to listen to the conversation going on around her, but she became aware that Cecil's prospects of getting into the Army were under dis-

cussion, and that Sir Eric was offering to help him, which seemed to please her brother very much indeed.

Presently, he and Captain Mayling strolled on to the house, and she was aroused from her reverie by a hand finding its way through her arm.

"What! pretty one! relapsed into a transcendental mood. Did you hear me making a friend of your brother?"

"I was not listening to what you said, but I saw you were getting on well together."

"Will you tell me what you were thinking about?"

"Oh! no, I couldn't," she replied nervously. He laid a hand upon either arm, and thus holding her, he looked straight down into her eyes, till hers fell beneath his intent gaze.

"You were thinking of me, Clare; what is the use of your hiding the fact? Why should you, either? for I am thinking of you! You will fill my thoughts till I close my eyes in sleep, and then, dear, you will fill my dreams. There! have I said too much upon so short an acquaintance? Well, forgive me, for that disadvantage will mend day by day. Clare, how long ought a man to know a woman before he ventures to tell her that he has fallen in love with her?" and he smiled at her coaxingly.

"I do not know," she answered, very softly.

"And how long would a nice little girl be before she consented to give one pretty kiss to the fellow who she knew was pining for it, with her two red lips so near?"

"Oh! a very long time!"

"Then even nice little girls must have very hard hearts," Miss Jardine, and he turned towards the house.

A troubled look was upon the beautiful face.

"Shall we say good-bye, to-night, Clare?" he asked, stopping suddenly before her; "or will you give me a real welcome if I return?"

There was a strong quivering of the cupid mouth, and the girl's colour came and went fitfully.

She knew quite well what she ought to say, but for the life of her she could not bid him leave her for ever.

"Tell me, my beautiful!" he whispered low, letting his hand creep within the shelter of her arm again.

His touch seemed to magnetise her. She felt she could not part with this new pleasure.

"Come!" she faltered.

In a moment his arm was about her, and he had stolen the kiss which she had refused.

"I will—I will be your shadow dear. Hush! I hear a footstep coming! It is your father!"

They started apart and went to meet him.

"I have left Burton's horse in his stable, and yours is in mine, making the most of his time over a feed of oats."

"I hope you left your friend better?" said Sir Eric, politely.

"I trust that he will be so to-morrow," replied Mr. Jardine. "I have recommended him to have a hot bath and go to bed. I never knew that horse give him trouble."

"It was not his fault. We were having a picnic behind the trees, and startled the poor beast. What I regret most is the hurt to your daughter's foot; otherwise I should rejoice that the slight accident has thrown me into the path of an old officer whose name is still familiar to me in the service."

"Indeed! Am I still remembered?" inquired Clare's father, with a gleam of pleasure.

"I should think so, indeed! You and your son must come and see me when my leave is over, if you will, and we shall have real satisfaction in entertaining you at our mess."

"You are very good; but I gave up the old life for a working one; and I think I had better not look back into paradise."

"I will not take 'no' for an answer, and hope before I leave this part of the world that we shall become great friends. I am negotiating for rooms at a farmhouse not many miles from here, and I will call in and tell you my address."

"Do, my dear fellow. It will be quite refreshing to have someone to talk shop with.

That boy of mine is red-coat mad, and I do not know whether to let him have his own way or not. You see, I have no longer any friends at court, and a man cannot get on in any profession without a certain amount of interest."

"I think I may say without vanity that I have a good deal, Captain Jardine; and if you will let me help your son, I shall be only too glad, for I have taken a fancy to the lad, and consider he would be an ornament to the service."

"You really are very kind," answered Clare's father, warmly, as he laid his hand upon the stranger's shoulder, familiarly; and turning to his daughter he added, "You have not mentioned this gentleman's name, my dear."

"Sir Eric du Val, papa," she answered, with a feeling of satisfaction.

"Come in, Sir Eric," said her father; "you will always be welcome when you care to come here, and it will be like old times to me to cotton with one of the old sort again. Country life is very peaceful and pleasant; but, as you may fancy, I often sigh for the old scenes and haunts."

"I do not wonder at that," replied Sir Eric, warmly; "but you have a sweet little place here."

Everyone was charmed with the Baronet, except Mrs. Jardine. But as she saw how great a favourite he was, she said nothing; and so he became a constant visitor at Willowdene.

The accident to John Burton proved more serious than had been anticipated, and it was some weeks before he was able to resume his usual duties.

Mr. Jardine and his son, however, stood in the gap, and spent most of their time seeing to matters at Honour Oak Farm, feeling glad in this way to repay some of John's kindness to themselves.

Mrs. Jardine, too, was constantly there, helping to nurse the sufferer and assisting the invalid.

All this left Clare very much alone; for, although she ran every morning over to see the man to whom she was pledged, to carry him a dainty buttonhole, arranged by her own fingers she did it more as a matter of duty than anything else, and was glad to get it over, so as to set the rest of her day free. Every one of those flowers was treasured by honest John.

To say that he did not want her more with him would be untrue; but he thought it natural that so young and bright a girl should prefer the sunshine to the shadows; and illness always casts a gloom around it.

So he welcomed her warmly and lovingly; nor did he reproach or chide her that her visits were flying ones.

Mrs. Burton noted it with a sigh, but felt that words from her upon such a subject would carry far more pain than pleasure, so she was silent.

Sir Eric Du Val succeeded in getting apartments at a farmhouse about three miles from Willowdene, and when Clare left her acknowledged lover she flew to meet her clandestine one; while her mother thought her by poor John's bedside.

There was a pretty little wood, where the ground wore a carpet of wild flowers, and was roofed with green leaves, beneath the shade and shelter of which was Clare's place of tryst with Sir Eric Du Val.

It was well out of the sight and sound of the outside world, and lay midway between Gerse Farm and Willowdene, so that it was easy for both lovers to meet.

On this particular occasion Clare was there awaiting his arrival, seated upon the gnarled roots of an old oak. The moment their eyes met Clare knew she was found out.

"Clare," he said, suddenly, "why have you deceived me all this time?"

"About what?" she queried, anxious to temporise.

"As if you do not know," he returned, with some impatience. "Is it true or not that you

are engaged to the man you represented to me as your friend and neighbour?"

"It is true. Who told you?" she faltered. "Your mother. So I know the news must be correct. Do you mean to marry him or no?"

Clare covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Eric!" she pleaded, "don't be cruel to me!"

"Cruel to you! that is good. Why have you deceived me? Tell me that!"

"Cannot you guess?" she panted. "Oh! my dear, surely you need not ask—"

His face softened, and he drew down her hands and held them in his own.

"Was it because you loved me, sweetheart, that you kept silence?"

"Yes. Cannot you understand that, Eric?"

A sad expression settled upon his features. "Unfortunately, I can!"

"And you will forgive me?" and the blue eyes were upturned to his, swimming in tears.

He stooped over her until their lips met.

"Place your arms about my neck, darling, and tell me you love me, Clare!"

"I love you with all my heart!"

"Poor wee child! Now kiss me fondly, lovingly."

She obeyed him, like the child she was.

"Clare, do you care for that great rough farmer, John Burton?"

"He is not rough, Eric. He can be wondrously gentle to me, and to his mother, too."

"His mother! You are going to be her nurse and keeper, in fact."

"Oh, no! John would not ask such a thing."

"He would—he will. Your mother told me that Mrs. Burton will live with you."

"John has never mentioned such an idea."

"No, he takes it as a matter of course; and this will be your loophole for freedom, if you desire it."

"Eric, how can you say it? Oh, my dear! I don't know how it came about. I never meant to accept John. He took me by storm, as it were, and it was all settled before I knew what I was doing, and then every one was so happy and pleased that thought I would try and be pleased also; and poor John was very kind, so it all went on satisfactorily till we met, dear, and since then—"

"And since then," repeated Sir Eric, relentlessly.

"I have been very miserable, and very happy too."

"And what are you going to do, child?"

She shivered.

"How can I tell? You will soon be going away, Eric, and then I suppose you will forget me, and I shall marry John."

"You shall not marry that clown!" he said, passionately.

Her heart gave a great bound.

It was just what she wanted to hear him say.

She had not the faintest desire now to be poor John Burton's wife.

She clung to Sir Eric lovingly.

"Will you not forget me, dear?" she whispered.

He held her from him and looked deep down into her eyes with a strange sad look in his own.

"I would to Heaven I could, Clare; but I shall never forget you, dear. I took you straight into my heart the day we first met. I cannot pretend that I have never taken a fancy to any woman before; but, child, I have never loved as I love you. No, I shall never forget you. It would be better for us both if I could; but, sweet little witch, I have you with me always. For you I would do anything—anything! You are dearer to me than honour. I could sin for you, child, ay, do it cheerfully."

There was a deep earnestness and passion in the man's words, carrying conviction with them. Clare believed him at once.

"Eric, if you love me so, I can never marry poor John."

"You never shall while I am above ground, my darling. Neither John Burton nor any other man shall call you wife."

"Shall I tell, papa?" she asked.

He remained for some time in thought.

"No, darling, not yet; be guided by me entirely. Let things go on as they are. I cannot at the present time ask openly for my little pet in marriage. Why, I cannot explain to you just now; but you can trust your old Eric, can you not, darling?"

"I will trust you, dear," she answered low.

"And do all I ask you?"

"Yes, all."

"Then let things go on as they are till my next long leave, when I hope to see clearly how to arrange things for our future."

"And shall I not hear from you for a whole year?"

"I am afraid not, sweet one. We must not risk letters, but I will return, never fear; and I shall daily and hourly think of you. If you receive any little anonymous gifts, my pet, you will know from whom they come. When it comes on the tapis that Mrs. Burton is to live with you, you can slip out of the engagement with no real trouble. Let it all come about naturally."

"Very well, if you wish it to be so, Eric; but I would rather have ended it now, and let them all know of my love for you. My dear, is it not strange? You are just what I have pictured from childhood, as the man I wished to marry, and I feel so proud of you."

"Well, you must keep our secret from every one for the present, little love. Do you promise to do so?"

"Yes! I will do all you desire me."

"That is well. Trust yourself wholly to me, and we shall come into smooth water by and by. Do you remember what I said to you that first day we met? 'Trust to your father, and he will pull you through.'"

"Yes! I recollect," she answered, with a happy smile; "but Eric dear, you speak as though there will be trouble before we come into harbour. Have you any sorrow which I know nothing of?"

"Did I say so, small imaginative one?"

"No, not in words, but your voice did."

"Well, you are right, Clare, I have a trial, but it concerns another person, and I cannot tell it even to you; so let us say no more about it. Some day it will pass away; then we will laugh over it together; but now I must be silent, and you must be content to trust me."

"I am content to trust you, Eric."

"That is my own dear good child. Look here, little one, I have a ring of my mother's, which I have worn upon my watch chain ever since her death. I value it more than anything else I have. Wear it round your neck until I can give you an engagement ring to take the place of that upon your finger," and he slipped his watch back into his pocket with no chain whatever, and fastened it about her slender throat, placing it under her collar out of sight. "I would not give that to anyone in the world but you, Clare, darling. Take care of it," he whispered: "I loved my mother dearly."

"It is only a loan, Eric," she returned, softly. "You shall have it back safely. I will take care of it for your dear sake."

"My dearest, do you know the time? You will scarcely be back to your lunch, and then questions will be asked which you will find it difficult to answer, so I must part with you now, darling; but I am to dine at Willowdene to-night, and we shall meet again to-morrow, so I must let you go now. I will walk to the entrance to the wood as usual, and there say au revoir."

Clare was late, and had to make the best of her way home; but she got in without especial comment, and was in her place at table as usual.

Very pretty looked Clare Jardine as she stood before her mirror twining a spray of jasmine in her hair. Then she regarded herself attentively.

"There! you will do," she remarked to her reflection. "You will make a very pretty little Lady Du Val! Oh, how glad I am

that Eric loves me. Fancy marrying poor old John, after knowing such a man as Eric. Why, I couldn't."

"John is plain, and heavy, and unromantic, and Eric is—all my fancy painted him." He is altogether delightful. But I am sorry for poor old Jack; he will be cut up at first, no doubt. But the Vicar's adopted daughter, Rhoda Maylie, is over head and ears in love with him; he had better take his shattered heart to her to mend. She will be as willing as willing can be. Poor old John!"

and as she spoke she pinned another bunch of jasmine and a crimson rose upon the bosom of her soft white India muslin dress, which revealed, while it partly hid, the rounded arms and the white neck and shoulders.

The evening passed by pleasantly.

Sir Eric Du Val was really in love, and in all his actions he was trying to win the golden opinions of Clare and her relations.

He really had used his influence for Cecil Jardine, and it was settled at length that he was to go to Sandhurst at once, and started off with Sir Eric Du Val, who saw him settled there, and returned to say good-bye to Clare, clandestinely, for Mrs. Jardine and her husband believed him to be gone to join his regiment.

But he came back for one day, just to see Clare, and she had the painful pleasure of a final parting with the man she loved.

It was raining and blowing hard, but Sir Eric knew that his darling would be there.

She had much difficulty in getting out, but the old excuse of "going to see John" was ready, and, after a flying peep at him, she was away through the deluge to the wood.

Her lover was waiting for her at the gate. "I knew you would come, sweetheart!" he murmured, as he clasped her in his arms.

"I do hope you will not take cold!"

"If I do, I shall have plenty of time to nurse up before I come to meet you again, dear!" she answered, smiling at him sadly.

"My pet, come here every quarter day at this hour, and if I can meet you I will; if not, you must understand that duty is too strong for me, and that I cannot get away, and, knowing that, sweetheart, you must forgive me!"

"I will be here, Eric, and if you are absent, I shall not misjudge you!"

"Good little Clare. Ah! how the wind drives through the trees. Let me shelter you from it!" and he hummed, "Oh! wert thou in the cold blast!" in a soft, mellow voice, which became marvellously tender as he repeated, "I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee!" and he wrapped his overcoat around her and smiled down upon the sweet young face. Then his own grew grave.

"What is it, Eric?" she asked.

"Nothing, dear heart. I was only thinking how I wish we had met five years ago!"

"Will it not do as well now?" she asked, smiling too.

In reply, he clasped his arms about her, passionately, and kissed her again and again.

"Better late than never, little love. I could not spare you now. You are so very, very much to me!"

She clung to him with loving and tenacious arms.

"Oh! Eric! Eric! what shall I do without you?" she moaned.

"You shall not be without me, little love, one day longer than I can help it!" he whispered. "No one shall keep us asunder," he added, through his set teeth.

"Who should try?" she answered, low.

"Oh! Eric, you frighten me when you look like that!"

His face softened, and he drew her closer and closer, and they stood lip to lip, and heart to heart, and the wind howled dimly around them like a dirge, and shrieked in the tree-like branches overhead, with the voice as of human pain.

"Eric, I am so dreadfully afraid!" she said.

He clasped her even more closely, and once more sang to her. "I'll shelter thee, I'll

shelter thee!" and so they waited, dreading to part.

CHAPTER VI.

Clare lived upon those stolen meetings with Sir Eric Du Val.

On those days she lived, and through all the rest she existed.

Each month brought its changes to Willowdene.

News came from Sandhurst from Cecil, who was doing well.

An invitation arrived for Captain, or as we have hitherto usually called him, Mr. Jardine, to visit Sir Eric at Aldershot, and, much against his wife's wishes, he decided to accept it, for his son's sake, he said; but the real truth of the case was that having had the Baronet for a companion had made him discontented with the quiet life which he had led for some years. His nature was weak and pleasure-loving, and when the pleasure came his way, he had not the strength of mind to resist it.

Clare was only too pleased that he should go, and thought her mother's reluctance that he should do so, selfish, nor could she understand the look of sadness upon her face as he drove off to the station. Afterwards she comprehended that Mrs. Jardine knew her husband's nature better than she understood that of her father.

Nor was that the only visit to Aldershot. Captain Jardine spent a great deal of his time with the 223rd Fusiliers, who were a decidedly fast set, from the Colonel down to the junior subaltern, fond of racing, card-playing, and mischief of all sorts.

Very jolly, pleasant, fascinating fellows were many of them, with plenty of money in their pockets to squander at their wicked wills.

Intimate acquaintance with them soon began to bear fruit.

Captain Jardine became a dandy once more. The clothes which answered excellently at Willowdene would not do at all at Aldershot, and Sir Eric took him to town to his own tailor, and became answerable for whatever he chose to order. Little by little he fell into Sir Eric's card-playing ways, and went with him to various races.

At first he had no idea whatever of betting, but finding the Baronet's purse open to him, he soon lost pride and borrowed from him largely.

His luck was seldom good, and in the evenings he felt the pangs of remorse, which he tried to drown in the wine cup.

When he was at Willowdene, the Captain was longing to be back with the lively spirits of the 223rd Regiment, and could not settle down either to his work or in his home.

But for John Burton Willowdene Farm must have gone to rack and ruin.

He looked on with wonder at the change in his friend, but he felt that it was not possible for him to take an older man than himself to task; so he just did what he could for him, working the farm with his own, and giving Mrs. Jardine money from the proceeds when her husband was not there to possess himself of it and squander it.

Moreover, John paid all Cecil's expenses at Sandhurst, and all his uniforms were purchased by him when he entered the Army, and the interest of Sir Eric succeeded in getting him posted to his own regiment.

Captain Jardine and Cecil were never tired of singing the Baronet's praises, declaring him to be a splendid fellow all round, and Clare most thoroughly agreed with them.

John Burton and Mrs. Jardine only looked grave, and were afraid of the influence of this delightful man.

As for Clare, she absolutely worshipped Sir Eric Du Val, and obeyed his wishes implicitly.

More than once honest John Burton spoke of their coming marriage; but Clare too evidently shrank from the idea for him to press it.

She was very gentle to him, however. The love within her heart—albeit it was for another man—softened her and made her so. And he, pleased by her kindness, troubled not

to question why it was, so long as she was kind. Even Mrs. Burton smiled now hopefully, and stroked the golden head with a more loving hand.

"John, dear," she said to him, with a smile, "your sweetheart has greatly improved."

"Ay, mother," he replied, "if there ever was room for improvement—Clare was always perfect in my eyes—perhaps the fruit is riper and more mellow. I count myself a lucky man to have gained such a prize."

Poor John Burton! he little knew of the stolen meetings in the wood, or of the wild love in the heart of Clare for another man.

As for Clare, she grew really fond of honest John.

He soothed her as no one else could do. In her feverish sorrow at the loss of Sir Eric for week's together, John was her greatest comfort. So long as he did not speak too much of his love, or at all of their approaching marriage, she was happier with him than with any one.

She felt deep down in her heart how good and true he was; and his kindness to her seemed like a cool hand laid upon a hot brow, and the most peaceful hours she knew were those she enjoyed driving about the country alone with him.

The vicar of the village of Honour Oak was an old man and a poor one. In fact, the living was scarcely worth the having, and that was probably why it was given to Mr. Gregson.

Some years before he had adopted a little girl, the orphan child of an old college friend, who had been left alone in the world in consequence of the death of her parents, and Mr. Gregson, at his dying friend's wish, had become a father to his little girl.

Mr. Gregson had the most profound admiration for John Burton, whose purse was always open for him to dip into for the sick and suffering of his flock; and little Rhoda Maylie entirely shared the opinions of her adopted father.

To Rhoda Maylie John Burton was a god among men, and a sorrow which she did not understand contracted her heart when she saw him so often with Clare Jardine, and heard their engagement spoken of.

The sharp eyes of Clare soon detected the girl's secret.

The half-shy glance and changing colour told her all there was in the untutored heart; and Clare used to weave a romance, namely, that when she was gone, Rhoda would comfort John Burton, and after a time become mistress of Honour Oak Farm.

She did not think that John's faithful heart would change all at once, but she hoped that little by little it would turn to Rhoda Maylie.

Months rolled into years, all the changes going on and deepening.

Cecil Jardine seldom came to Willowdene, which by the light of his new gay life he called "too slow," and "dead as ditch water," but Clare had the great delight of attending a military ball.

Mrs. Jardine positively declined to go, so Clare went with her father, to the decided annoyance of John Burton, who felt that it would unsettle his darling in her quiet life.

He went to Willowdene to invite Mrs. Jardine over to dine with his mother and himself, and he walked back with her in the evening.

On their way the poor woman opened her heart to him.

"John," she said, "I have always felt that you are a son to me."

"Well, he replied, cheerfully, "that is only anticipating a little, is it not mother? and the sooner it is a reality the better pleased I shall be; but Clare seems in no hurry."

"That is just it. My whole family seem pleasure mad."

"It is only natural after all in Clare that she should like a peep into the gay world," answered John, in defence of the girl he loved.

"John," cried Mrs. Jardine, "if she sees too much of the gay world she will never settle down at Willowdene or at Honour Oak

Farm either. If you want her for your wife make a stand when she returns, and insist upon an early marriage."

"If I want her for my wife!" he returned, quite indignantly. "Mrs. Jardine, dear, surely you forget that Clare and I have already plighted our faith to one another. I will ask her to name an early day, but I would not press her into haste if she wishes to wait, any more than I could dream that she could break her word to me. Dear little Clare, I only wish she would come home that I might make her entirely happy!"

Mrs. Jardine sighed.

"I wish, John, I had your childlike faith and trust. I confess I am afraid, and scent coming trouble for us each and all."

"Indeed, I hope not," he answered, gravely. "But for you," she continued, "where would our home be now? So far you have saved Willowdene, but I fear for its master, John. You must see how the love of pleasure has changed Frank."

He pressed the hand upon his arm.

"Yes, I have noticed it. Speak to him, mother. He loves you, and will give up the world, as he did before, for your sake."

"I will try," she answered; "but, John, I am out of heart, and that's the truth."

"Don't lose heart," he whispered; "ask him to do it for your love's sake, which used to be so very much to him."

"Ay, that is true; I will try, I will do my best. I have been vexed with him of late, and perhaps I have shown it, and been less affectionate."

"Try and be your old self, and win him back," whispered John.

"If it be not too late," replied she, sadly.

"It can never be too late to mend, while life lasts," said he, earnestly. "I think there is no sin against me I could not forgive, if only I knew that I was still beloved; and your husband loves you."

"I hope so, John. I have not yet come to doubting that."

"Never doubt it if you value your peace," whispered he. "Cheer up, dear Mrs. Jardine, we shall all be sitting in the sunshine soon, with these dark clouds rolled by, and you and I will be smiling into each other's faces as we remember our walk home to-night, and the sad thoughts which tried so hard to dim our happiness."

They were standing then under the porch of Willowdene, and John's hand was upon the bell pull.

"I won't ask you in to-night, John; it is late, and I want to think," she murmured.

They pressed hands, and the stars blinked overhead. The door opened, and Mrs. Jardine passed in.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night," he echoed.

Then the door closed, and he stood out in the night alone.

CHAPTER VII.

Cecil Jardine brought his sister home.

"His father was staying on with Sir Eric Du Val," he explained, "and might not be back for some little time."

Having her son with her seemed to cheer Mrs. Jardine up, although Cecil was not at all what he had been.

But he had vastly improved in appearance and manners, which made the mother's heart proud; although there was none of the old love of home which had characterised the boy in his youth.

He was delighted with his own position in the world, and his love of the army was genuine.

"It was awfully good of old John to have stood in the gap in that affair," he said to his mother, "although had he not done so, Sir Eric would have seen me through."

"You are lucky to have such friends," returned Mrs. Jardine; "but, of course, you could not have accepted such a favour at the hands of a stranger. Your sister being engaged to John, made a family matter of it."

"Yes! and his kindness to me only prevents my persuading Clare to break through such an engagement."

"I am glad something prevents you, Cecil," returned Mrs. Jardine, dryly. "Why should not Clare keep her word to John? She will never get a kinder husband."

"Simply because he is not our class," said Cecil. "He is good enough, but Clare is a great beauty, and could do far better for herself. You should have seen the attention she received at our ball. The fellows all told me I ought to be very proud of such a sister; even Du Val admires her. And she is wonderfully pretty—a regular Jardine. We met a lot of our swell cousins at the ball, too, and they said so also. The fact is, Clare is not in the least fitted for a farmer's wife; she is worthy of a different fate."

"She should have thought of that before. If John was good enough when she accepted him, he is good enough now. He has in no wise deteriorated."

"Well! I admit I couldn't ask such a brother-in-law to our mess. The fellows would think I have got hold of a country cousin! Still, I like John on his own acres, and I have no doubt he will always be ready to help a lame dog over the stile. I'll do him that justice."

"You cannot do him too much justice!" answered his mother; "but I hope, my boy, there will be no lame dogs to assist. You have chosen your profession, knowing yourself to be a poor man, and you must learn to say 'no' to expenses which you cannot afford."

The young man whistled thoughtfully, and passed his hand with a caressing gesture over his moustache.

"Ah! yes, mater, that is all very well, but theory and practice are two very different matters. A man may say he will live on his pay, but he can't do it in a regiment like ours, and I doubt if he can at all. So far, Du Val has been a regular brick, and has put me up to a lot of 'tips' for making money; and when I have burnt my fingers he has paid up without a word, for me. In fact, he has taken me under his wing."

"But, Cecil, you don't accept money from Sir Eric Du Val?"

"Why not? He has plenty of it, and I have very little."

Mrs. Jardine turned pale.

"And your father?" she asked.

"He's enjoying himself immensely. He has gone to the races to-day with some of his relations, who appear to have forgiven him, and then he returns to Aldershot."

"Cecil, I hope your father does not bet on these races?" she said, anxiously.

"Can't say; I never asked him. You would hardly know our quiet farmer pater for the 'awful dad' he is away from home and among men of his own position. Why shouldn't he have a 'pony' on the race if he likes, mother?"

"Simply because he can't afford it."

"We should not do much if we only did what we can afford," he laughed; "but there is a good old saying, 'Nothing venture, nothing have!' I believe in striking out boldly; a feeble swimmer never gets on, you know."

Mrs. Jardine shook her head.

"Who has been teaching you such doctrines, my dear boy? I fear they will bring you into trouble. It is all very well to quote old sayings; I could do the same. 'Lightly come, lightly go' is one of them. I prefer to see a man 'slow and sure.'"

"Like John Burton, eh?" laughed Cecil.

"Yes, like John. He is every inch a man. I consider him a very fine character."

"Oh! no doubt," replied the young soldier, with a stifled yawn; "but you must admit he is heavy on hand."

"I admit nothing to his detriment."

"Mother, I shall tell the pater he has cause to be jealous of John Burton," laughed the other.

"And he will believe you," returned she, laughing, too; but although she laughed, her heart was very sad.

Cecil returned to Aldershot the same afternoon, calling in to ask John for the loan of fifty pounds on his way to the station.

That good fellow gave him what he asked for without a question; and as he placed the cheque in his breast pocket he laughingly remarked upon the admiration Clare had excited at Aldershot.

"You ought to be very proud of such a prize," he said. "I can tell you the fellows were 'pulling caps' for her, and she could have filled her programme with partners half a dozen times over."

"I don't wonder at that, but I am glad she is home again," answered John, quietly; "and I shall be still more so when she decides to come to Honour Oak Farm for good."

"Of course you will, John; and now I must be off, or I shall lose my train."

"Is your father home, Cecil?"

"No, he has gone to some races. He has some rather heavy bets on, but don't tell the mater. Ta, ta!" And thoughtless, light-hearted Cecil Jardine was up in his father's dog-cart, and on his way to the station.

John Burton looked after him with a thoughtful face.

"I meant to do right, but I fear it will turn out wrong. Mrs. Jardine never wished him to enter the Army; but Clare desired it, and the boy's heart was set on it, and his father was glad. I don't know that I can blame myself exactly; but I wish the old life had never been interrupted. Well! I must go round and see how my dear girl is after all her dissipation"; and, taking his hat from its accustomed place in the hall, he strolled across the fields; and, meeting Mrs. Jardine at the hall door, she told him that he would find Clare in the drawing-room arranging some flowers, and bade him enter by the French window.

He stepped off the soft lawn into the room unheard, and Clare was before him. She was looking at his likeness, and two large tear-drops had fallen from her blue eyes upon it. His heart bounded with a sudden great joy.

"My beautiful!" he cried, "what is it?" and in another moment his arms were about her. "What! weeping, my pretty one? Tell your old Jack your trouble," and he drew her head upon his shoulder.

"I have no trouble, Jack. I am happy, very happy, but I feel nervous to-day and low-spirited. It is the fatal effects of too much enjoyment, I suppose; but, oh! I wouldn't have missed the ball for anything. You cannot think how beautiful it all was. The rooms were decorated with real living soldiers standing as still as waxworks, in full uniform, and the walls were glittering with swords and bayonets in such fine devices, and hung with flags, and the colours of the regiment, which had been through so many wars, and were tattered, torn, and blood-stained; and then the evergreens, and ferns, and flowers, and the band. Oh! Jack, it was all so heart-stirring and so different to dead-and-alive old Willowdene. I felt like Cinderella coming back here, I assure you."

John Burton looked very grave. He took her hand and led her to the sofa, and held it.

"My pet," he said. "I think a quiet home life is better and holier than the turmoil of the gay world, and I hope you will stay at home with your own old John in the future. Lassic, darling, I think I have been patient, but mother and I want you at Honour Oak Farm very much, and I hope my dear girl will consent to be my wife now very soon. I have wished to say this to you so very often, Clare dear, and now it is said. Fix our wedding-day, like a good little love."

Clare Jardine was very pale. She loved Sir Eric Du Val, but giving John Burton pain was no longer a pastime to her.

"Your mother and you want me," she repeated, slowly. "No, John, I don't believe in living with a mother-in-law."

"You must be joking, Clare! You would not wish me to send my mother away. Why,

dear girl, the home is more hers than mine. Impossible! I could not ask her to leave it!"

"As you please, John!"

"What does that mean, Clare?"

"That I can't marry you—that is all."

He rose and paced the room with conflicting emotions.

"I never expected this," he said, at length, stopping before her. "Clare, surely you do not mean it?"

She rose and stood before him, her face very pale, and her hands clasped convulsively together.

"Yes I do! I am not fit for you, John. I—I could never nurse an invalid for the rest of my days!"

"The rest of her days, you mean, Lassic," he said, brokenly; "it would not be for long, more's the pity, for I love my mother dearly."

"If she is more to you than I am, John, let it be so!" she answered, with a touch of temper; for, although she had no thought of wedding him now, she would have liked to know that he would have given up all for her sake.

"Clare," he said, with suppressed passion, "how can you say such things? My love for you would in no wise interfere with my affection for my mother. The two feelings are separate and apart."

"John," said the girl, "Rhoda Maylie loves you. She would make an excellent nurse for Mrs. Burton, and would be grateful for a home. Think of my words when I am far away, and know that I would have wished to see her your wife," and Clare Jardine slipped from the room like a ghost.

CHAPTER VIII.

John Burton remained staring at the door like a man stunned. After a while Mrs. Jardine passed and saw him. She entered the room and laid her hand kindly upon his shoulder.

"John, what is it?" she asked, simply.

"I hardly know," he answered, in a voice all unlike his own. "I suppose I did something wrong. Anyway, it is all over now."

"What is all over?" inquired Clare's mother, nervously.

"Our engagement. Clare has given me up."

"Why?"

"Heaven knows!"

"She must have assigned some reason."

"She was annoyed because I told her that mother and I wanted her home."

"I suppose she thought you hurried her?"

"No, it was not that. She said she would not live with a mother-in-law."

"John, you must have been mistaken."

"No, I was not! In some cases I should have said she had the right to choose, but no woman with a heart could ask a son to turn such a mother as mine out of doors, helpless as she is, too."

"And you refused?"

"I did."

"John, I respect you. You acted rightly. Clare must have had a wilful fit on. She will be sorry before long. Let her alone, let her think you accept her decision; she will soon want you back. Why, after all these years, surely she could not do without you!"

"So I had hoped, mother!"

"That is right, call me mother still. I hope this vexation will soon pass. Clare was made too much of by the red-coats, and does not yet understand that ball-room adoration is a most ephemeral thing, and passes away with the glare and glitter of the pleasant evening. Don't lose heart, John. I shall not pretend to know that anything is wrong between you. I prophesy it will come right in a few days!"

"Mrs. Jardine," said he, very earnestly, "if I lose Clare, I hope you will not blame me, or let it make any difference in our friendship. I would die for your daughter's happiness, but I cannot sacrifice my mother. She must never know of this. It would break her heart!"

"You have been too good a friend to me and mine, John, for me ever to care for you less under any circumstances; but I still hope

Clare will regret her hasty words. You are right, Mrs. Burton must never be told of her folly!" and she held out both her hands to John Burton, which he clasped silently, and then passed out of the window, through which he had entered with so glad a heart; but then the joy had all died out, and the light had left his eyes. He looked many years older than when Mrs. Jardine had seen him only a few minutes before.

She had expressed a hope that Clare had not really meant what she had said; but John had no such hope.

He walked quietly home with bent head, looking like a man who had heard of the death of a dear one, whereas he had only heard of the death of his long cherished hopes, and he found that quite enough to hear. Still, he was not the man to speak one word against the woman he loved.

He walked into the room which he always made bright and pretty for his mother, and kissed her, a little more tenderly perhaps than usual.

"John," she said, anxiously, "are you ill?"

He laid his hand in hers, reassuringly.

"Not a bit of it, mother; a little lazy this afternoon, perhaps, so I have come to bear you company!"

"My boy, that is not all," she said sadly. "Is it Clare?"

When her name was mentioned John Burton's composure gave way—he walked to the window and looked out; and Mrs. Burton knew that something was wrong which her son did not mean to tell, and with a wisdom seldom displayed she said no more, expressing her sympathy by hand and eye only, until he went out to see to farming matters, then hot tears of sorrow dimmed the faded eyes.

"Clare has vexed my boy!" she murmured. "I feared it would be so some day. She is so very willful!"

How much more bitter would have been her tears had she dreamed that Clare had made her the excuse for gaining her freedom.

Clare Jardine was up in her own room until tea time, with her door locked.

Mrs. Jardine had decided to let her alone, and to say nothing to her daughter whatever, being well aware that opposition strengthens some natures in evil.

The girl entered the dining-room with erect head and defiant eyes, ready to do battle; but her mother took no notice of what had happened, and, little by little Clare became more like her usual self. Still there was a restlessness about her; she sang a snatch of a song when tea was over, and broke off in the middle; she drank her tea feverishly, but not one mouthful could Mrs. Jardine persuade her to eat.

She essayed to read a novel; but her mother saw that the book was upside down.

She talked at intervals, as one who speaks at random, and seemed unaware of her own mistakes.

Supper was very much like tea.

Clare ate but little, and as soon as the meal was over Mrs. Jardine suggested retiring to bed.

The girl lingered for some time in the passage, holding her mother's hand, and kissed her many times, which was not her custom, and Mrs. Jardine, thinking that she was inclined to tell her about her having broken her engagement with John, rather hurried away, considering that the least said the soonest mended, and hoping within a few hours she would make it up again with him.

Once in her room the girl sat down and had a good cry.

She was going away, and her home seemed dearer to her than it had ever done before.

The remembrance of John Burton's sad face was plain before her mental vision.

All his goodness for so many years rose up and arrayed itself before her.

She knew how deeply he loved her, and how he would suffer, how he was even then suffering.

Girls are too apt to rejoice over conquests, but, if they have hearts themselves, the day will come when each pain inflicted by them rebounds upon themselves, and causes keen sorrow to their own breast.

Clare was a decidedly thoughtless girl; but that night she could not shut out the sufferings of honest John Burton.

The clock upon her mantel-piece struck, and started her from her reverie.

She drew the chain from its hiding-place and caressed it with her soft fingers as she had so often done before, opened a locket and gazed long at the handsome face of Sir Eric Du Val, and gradually her sadness cleared away, and a smile dimpled her round cheek.

She rose and took a black leather "Gladstone" bag from a shelf and packed a few of her personal treasures, then sat looking at John's engagement ring, which was still upon her finger.

"It must come off," she whispered to herself, "but I can't return it to the giver. That would pain him worst of all to give him back his gift." So she hid it beneath the wool of one of her trinket boxes, and placed it in her bag.

Then she dressed in the handsomest costume she possessed, and made her way silently down the stairs and out of the same French window through which John Burton had made his sorrowful exit, with her bag in her hand.

All pain seemed to have left her heart. It beat with an exultant throb, just tinged with nervousness, for she started more than once as the night breeze sighed among the trees, and caught at her breath.

At a certain point she paused and listened. A mellow voice was breaking the stillness which reigned before, "I'll shelter thee—I'll shelter thee;" and in another moment the arms of Sir Eric Du Val were about her, and in low, soft tones he was promising to love her through time and eternity, and to shield her against all the world.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Jardine arose at her usual hour the next morning and descended to the breakfast-room. The urn was soon hissing and spluttering upon the table, sounding homely and comfortable; but Clare had not made her appearance, so the mother sent the servant up to call her. The girl returned breathless.

"Miss Clare is not there, ma'am!"

"Not there! What do you mean?"

"I can't tell. I'm afraid it's something dreadful. Her room is all in confusion, and her bed has not been slept in, and, now I come to think of it, the drawing-room window was not fastened this morning."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Jardine, firmly, but she turned pale nevertheless. "Miss Clare has made her bed herself and gone out for a walk. Bring the bacon. I'll have breakfast."

The mother tried not to believe that anything could possibly be wrong.

She did her best to force her breakfast down, but with no satisfactory result; and as soon as she could do so without observation she crept quietly up the stairs to Clare's room and, closing the door behind her, she surveyed it minutely.

There was not one word left behind, but there were evident signs of a hasty departure.

The drawers were all left open and the clothes were scattered about.

The Gladstone bag was missing, and her two best dresses from the wardrobe and all her toilet requisites.

Yes! Clare was gone—but where?

Mrs. Jardine's legs shook under her, and she sank into the nearest chair, covering her face with her hands.

She never knew how long she remained there—her mind was absolutely chaotic. A footstep on the stairs aroused her at length. It was her servant looking for her; but when Mrs. Jardine unfastened the door, the sight

of her white face silenced even her voluble tongue.

The mistress told her to go for Mr. Burton, but not to mention Clare's name to anyone, and the girl promised.

She saw him directing his men in the fields and went to him.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Jardine wants you to come at once!" she said, regarding him with a look of intelligence.

He dropped his spade upon the ground and followed her without question, although a dozen arose in his mind, and she had her work cut out to keep pace with him.

She opened the door of Willowdene and he passed straight into the morning-room. Mrs. Jardine rose to meet him with outstretched hands.

"John, John, what shall I do? She is gone!" Her voice became a wail as she spoke, and her eyes were heavy with tears.

There was no need to ask to whom she referred.

"By Heaven!" he replied, with blanched cheeks. "What drove her to that? Mother, did you blame her for what I told you?"

"No, I never spoke to her."

"Is there another man?" he asked, hoarsely, as he grasped a chair-back for support.

"John, I do not know," replied Clare's mother, solemnly. "We must not lose time. What am I to do?"

"No, we must not lose time. Have you no idea where she has gone?"

"None!"

"We must send for her father. He has the best right to know. A telegram would make the affair public. I had better go to him, if you can do without me. Will you drive me to the station? I shall just catch the up train."

Neither of them thought of the need to change his farming clothes. Clare filled the mind of both, and the London express carried John Burton with it.

When he reached Aldershot he could find no one. Clare's father and brother were absent, but, after hours of waiting, Captain Sir Eric Du Val came to him to Cecil Jardine's room, and gave him an address in London, where, he said, he would find Captain Jardine; and poor John Burton went on again.

He did find Captain Jardine, at midnight, in a gambling house, with wild, haggard eyes, who refused to leave it. But John would take no denial, and, leading him aside, whispered in his ear.

Captain Jardine staggered.

"Gone!" he repeated. "When and where?"

"Last night—heaven only knows where. Your wife is broken-hearted. Come to her"; and he led him unresistingly away. Clare's father seemed to be in a dream. He had left his last coins on the table, in the gambling house, and he uttered no words. He seemed crushed beneath the weight of his great misery. John travelled with him through the night, and they arrived at Willowdene in a station fly early in the morning. Poor Mrs. Jardine was shocked at the change in her husband, and feared for his mind.

He appeared unable to grasp the meaning of the disappearance of his daughter, and his eyes were vacant and wandering. There seemed nothing they could do. Mrs. Jardine wrote a full account of their troubles to her son, asking if he could throw any light upon the disappearance of his sister; while John Burton wandered from station to station, making inquiries but finding out nothing, only to return home to fresh trouble.

Whether his mother had been told by any one of the disappearance of Clare, he never knew; but upon going into her room he found she had had a stroke and was speechless.

He loved her with a son's most true devotion, and this extra sorrow weighed down his whole soul.

Everything was done for her that could be done; but the doctor, who had attended her

(Concluded on page 233.)

EILEEN'S ROMANCE

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

Author of "Vernon's Destiny," "Ivy's Peril," "Royal's Promise," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the prologue we are introduced to Lady Helen Percy, who is alone in her boudoir, playing with her little son, when she is startled by the unceremonious entrance of a woman who turns out to be the first wife of her husband. The shock was too much for Lady Helen, and although she lingered for some months, never recovered. Henceforward, John Percy, the millionaire is dead to the world, and only cares for the son she left behind her.

Lucy Courtenay is engaged to Alan Ernescliff, and both families heartily approve of the match. They are spending August at Boulogne. Among other visitors are Mr. Desmond and his two daughters, Maude and Eileen.

Bob Ernescliff has fallen desperately in love with Maude Desmond, and takes his friend Basil Courtenay into his confidence. While on the sands one morning Eileen strays beyond her depth, and is in danger of drowning, when Basil rescues her, an incident that has far-reaching effects for him.

Mr. Desmond has now become Lord Desmond, through the death of his father, and they have taken up their residence at Desmondville, Yorkshire. Maude Desmond does all she can to suppress her sister Eileen. Lord Desmond is too weak to interfere. There is living at the lodge at the gates of Desmondville a Mrs. Venn, who pays for the privilege, and it is evident she has an object in so doing.

CHAPTER III.

ADAM GOLDSMITH was a very great favourite with the Vivian family. They had not known him very long. A few years since they had met him while travelling in Germany; an intimacy sprang up, and when, a few months later, he returned to England, the Earl and Countess welcomed him as a friend.

It was, perhaps, their countenance which made his acceptance by London society so easy, for few men ever had his history. All people knew of Mr. Goldsmith was that he had been partner in a great banking firm, had made a lot of money, and had now retired from business. He seemed to have no relations. When questioned indirectly he said his father had died before he was twenty, and that he could not remember his mother. He had been educated entirely in Germany, had travelled half over the world, was a kind-hearted, sensible man, a little too practical and businesslike, perhaps, for fashionable folks, but with a strain of generosity and lofty feeling, which redeemed him from the commonplace.

Lady Vivian told him he ought to marry, and offered to find him a wife. He replied, with a smile, he had never had time to think of such things, and that he thought he would rather do the finding himself.

Not deterred, my lady was always filling her house with pretty faces, and introducing their owners to Mr. Goldsmith; but, till the arrival of Maude Desmond, no tittle of success had crowned her efforts.

May, who was openly amused at her mother's match-making, declared Mr. Goldsmith was not in the least in love with Miss Desmond—that he seemed to regard her as some living enigma which it behoved him to study. Still, it must be confessed, he sought her society a great deal, and Lady Vivian's hopes ran high.

Lord Desmond's momentary faintness soon passed off. He returned to the house with his hostess, and Adam Goldsmith proceeded with Maude on the ramble so strangely interrupted.

"Your father does not look strong?"

"I think Yorkshire does not suit papa. I can't bear to think of his spending a winter here."

"But it is his native county."

"He has been away from it nineteen years. My grandfather was so angry at his second marriage that he banished him from Desmondville. He would have received him again

when his wife died, but papa refused. He said he would never accept the hospitality that had been refused to her."

"I like that," said Goldsmith, warmly. "Surely you must be proud of such devotion to your mother!"

Maude opened her eyes, and by her next speech spoilt any chance she might have had of being Mrs. Goldsmith.

She was not my mother. My mother was Lord Harley's daughter. Papa actually married a mere nobody after her death—a person who had been engaged as my governess. My aunt selected her when mamma died, little thinking what was to come of it!"

Mr. Goldsmith looked on the ground.

"Do you mean that the second Mrs. Desmond was uneducated or uncultivated?"

"She had been educated for a governess. I can just remember her—a pretty, silly sort of face, just like Eileen's. My father was literally infatuated with her. He might have married anybody, and he actually chose this little unknown nursery governess. Of course, it blighted his whole future!"

"Then you don't approve of romantic marriages?"

Miss Desmond hesitated. Certainly, if she became Mrs. Goldsmith it would not be a romantic match. She recollected this, and took courage.

"I think no woman ought to let a man sacrifice his prospects for her sake. It is a poor way of showing love!"

"And the other way. Do you think a man may expect the woman he marries to sacrifice aught for him? Supposing disgrace—as the world terms it—or loss of caste would follow on her becoming his wife, what then?"

Maude shook her head.

"I am not romantic, Mr. Goldsmith. I think no two people should marry without mutual respect and esteem. Unions which entail sacrifices are best not carried out!"

"Perhaps you are right," said her companion, slowly.

They went into lunch, and some strange error planted Mr. Goldsmith—whose rightful place was next Maude—between Lady May and her little friend. He talked to Eileen with the cordial ease a middle-aged man may show to a pretty child; but Mr. Courtenay, who was on her other side, considered he took up too much of her attention. The rest of the day passed swiftly without any special event, only when Eileen and her father were driving home, Lord Desmond asked suddenly—

"Eileen, what did you think of Mr. Goldsmith?"

"I liked him," returned the girl, simply. "He seems so true. I could not imagine his breaking his word."

But two days later Miss Desmond returned to her family in the most unamiable mood, for the great banker had gone home without asking the question she had expected. Moreover, the last day or two he had avoided her company, and his farewell was so cold and formal; she began to fear her rosy visions of sharing his wealth had been premature. Maude's temper at this time was so trying that Eileen and her father would have been thankful to the Vivians for inviting her again. Tony and Mrs. Ball came in for a full share of the beauty's displeasure. In short, the domestic atmosphere of Desmondville was a very breezy, and a great wave of relief came to Maude's family when she announced that her aunt, Mrs. Westwood, wished for her company at Ventnor.

"Is there a Mr. Westwood?" asked Eileen of her father, as they discussed the news, "or is she a widow?"

"Mrs. Westwood is a widow, but she has one son. He and Maude were brought up as brother and sister."

"What a pity?" echoed Eileen, mournfully. "Papa, I can't help it, but I do wish someone would marry Maude! You and I should get into a great many scrapes without her, but we should be much happier!"

Lord Desmond shook his head at this high treason; but yet, when the beauty was fairly off, a great fear fell on the old house.

Eileen and her father were always happy together, and friends came to see them—May Delaval often, her cousin oftener still. Basil had established his right to haunt Desmondville, and he was always welcome. Had he not saved Eileen's life; and did not that give him a claim to her father's gratitude?

He was very soon going to leave Yorkshire for his sister's wedding; but first there was to be a grand ball at the Court, and to this ball Lady Vivian insisted on Eileen's coming, overruling all Lord Desmond's scruples, and telling the child herself that she had set her heart on her making her debut at her house. So, as Eileen's wishes were all with Lady Vivian—and Lord Desmond could never bring himself to deny her a pleasure—the little lady and her trunk were driven over to the Court two days before the ball, that she might help the Countess and May in their preparations.

The dress was very simple—white lace. Old Mrs. Ball had unearthed a chest of bygone grandeur for her favourite's benefit, and no modern triumph of milliner's art could have suited the slight figure better than the robe of old lace, fastened with trailing ivy—ivy leaves nestling in the bright hair, and forming a necklace and bracelet for the snowy throat and arms.

"I am almost afraid to look at you!" said May, fondly. "You are so like a fairy, I am afraid of you vanishing away!"

Eileen Desmond was the fairest of all the fair girls at Lady Vivian's ball.

As she came into the vast hall at her aunt's side Basil's thoughts went back to the August morning at Boulogne, when he had striven with death for her possession, and prevailed. It was but two months ago, yet she was changed. She was a child no longer, but a beautiful girl, whom many men would love and covet for their own.

He was as poor as he well could be. His one dream of prosperity was a wealthy marriage. Nothing else could redeem his position and give him the place in the world that should have been his birthright. Eileen was portionless; nay, though a peer's daughter, she was unknown. She could bring as dowry neither money, lands, nor grand connections, only her own sweet face. And yet, as he watched her walk up the long ball-room at her aunt's side, Basil knew the truth. In spite of the maxims he had been brought up to believe, in spite of the doctrine impressed on him from childhood, that it was his duty to "marry money," he knew that in all the world he should never love another creature as he loved Eileen. She was his heart's choice, his best and dearest!

Eighteen and twenty-six, both old families, born with good looks, health, and intellect; but for one fatal obstacle they seemed made for each other. That one sad drawback was money!

He loved her, but he could not offer her a house; he loved her, but he could not give her the things most women regard as essential to their happiness.

She was so young, almost a child. Would it be cruel to seek her love, to ask her to wait for him until he had something to offer her, not, indeed, even then wealth, but sufficient for a simple home-life?

She was eighteen. In three years' time his pay would be increased to a sum which, little as it sounded in fashionable ears, had yet been proved sufficient for men to marry on.

Could he ask her to wait, to give up all chance of wealth and title, to wait in poverty



"THERE'S TROUBLE TO COME OF IT," EXCLAIMED MRS. VENN.

for three long years, and then marry an officer whose scanty income would be just enough for bare necessities?

He was to dance the first waltz with her. Eileen wondered at his silence. He hardly spoke at all. The poor child wondered if she had displeased him!

I was her first ball. She had looked forward to it for days and nights, yet it would lose all charm for her if her hero frowned.

Basil led her out on to the terrace when it was over, and walked, still in silence, to a conservatory which ran at the further end. There was no one there—they were quite alone.

"Are you vexed that I have brought you here, Eileen? Do you want to go back to the dancing?"

She nodded her head.

"I would rather stay here."

"Do you know that I am going away next week? Shall you miss me just a little, Eileen?"

"I shall miss you terribly."

"Dear," and the strong man's voice faltered as it had never done before. "Perhaps I ought to go away in silence, and not seek to know my fate, but I am no hero, Eileen. I cannot leave you without telling you all you are to me. I have loved you, I think, ever since that morning at Boulogne. You are dearer to me than any human creature. You are so bright and beautiful, my darling; you deserve a duke's coronet, and I am a poor man; only I love you, Eileen, better, I think, than life itself."

There was no answer. Her soft violet eyes were fixed on the ground; she could not raise them to his face.

"Dear," went on the young man, bravely. "I must not deceive you. I am what the world calls a shockingly bad match. I am so poor, Eileen, that I could not make a home for you until I get my promotion in three years' time, and then it would not be such a

home as I should like to give you. Eileen, could you give up riches and honours just for me?"

"You forget," said Eileen. "They are not mine to give up, but if they were I should still think love best."

"And you will try to love me, my own?"

She raised her eyes then, and gave him one long, tender glance.

"I don't need to try," she whispered. "You saved my life, and to whom should I give it but you?"

"And you are not afraid of poverty?"

"I have been poor all my life, and it has not made me unhappy. Only, are you sure? I am nothing but Eileen, and you are wise and great!"

Basil smiled.

"I want only Eileen," he answered her. "And for the rest, sweetheart, I am neither rich nor great. I am a soldier, and I try to do my duty to my country, but many do it better. We Courtenays have always been soldiers, and always done our best in our profession; but, Eileen, I shall work now as I never worked before, because it is for you. The hope that each day brings me nearer to you, that each day hastens the time when you will be my own, must speed me on."

They were both standing; her face was half hidden on his breast, and her fingers toyed with one of the buttons of his coat.

"Mr. Courtenay."

He smiled.

"Couldn't you say Basil, Eileen?"

"Basil, then. Are you quite sure you know?" pleaded the child. "I have lived abroad all my life. I don't know any of the things that come naturally to English girls. Maude says I am very stupid."

"Never mind Maude."

"And," the cheeks flushed crimson, but she persevered bravely, "did your sister tell you about—the *établissement*?"

"Yes," returned Basil, quickly. "My dear,

why should you think of that? Who could blame you for working hard for your father's sake?"

"I never thought it wrong—oh, never! But when Maude came she said it was terrible, and that an English girl would have worked her fingers to the bone rather than have done it."

"Forget Maude!" commanded Basil. "Never think of her unkind words. Eileen, sweetheart, believe me, the heaven who gave you your voice meant you to use it for your father's sake if needs were. I cannot bear the thought that you should have had to do so, but there was no shame in it, dear!"

"And you don't mind?"

He was a proud man, and the question was a difficult one; but his answer was all tenderness.

"Supposing you were back at Boulogne now, dear, and had promised to be my wife, I should not like the thought of your singing to every vaurien who could afford the trifling admission sum. But, Eileen, in the old time, when your father was poor and needed help, I think you were right; I do, indeed."

She smiled as one relieved from a great fear.

"He has loved me so," she said, "Other girls have mothers, and lots of friends and relations. I have no one in the world but my father, and yet he was so good he never let me miss what I had not."

"Do you think he will give you to me, Eileen?"

Eileen trembled.

"Must you ask him?"

"My child, you surely would not leave him in ignorance? Sweetheart, don't you know you have promised to be my wife? I must tell your father and my own."

"Oh, no!" pleaded the girl. "You know you said"—here she blushed crimson—"we must wait a long, long time. Why need we tell anybody?"

"But, Eileen," remonstrated Basil, "people always tell their friends when they are engaged. Just think of all the people who will dance with you and talk to you while I am away! Don't you think it's very unfair to them not to let them know the prize is won?"

Eileen shook her head.

"I would promise never to dance at all if you liked—never to speak to a stranger; but, oh! please do not tell my father."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you think he would be indignant at the presumption of a needy soldier in wishing to be his son-in-law?"

"No."

"What, then? Let me hear your reasons, Eileen?"

"Papa is kindness itself," said Eileen, slowly, "and when we are alone he does just what I like."

"Little, I grant."

She shook her head.

"But he is very different when Maude is at home. In Boulogne he never paid any attention to what she said, but here he seems to be influenced by her. He told me once when I cried about something that I did not understand English ways. Papa likes you, and he would be glad for me to be happy; but I am sure if you told him he would tell Maude."

"Then your real fears are of Miss Desmond?"

"Is it very foolish?" asked poor Eileen, trembling. "I am dreadfully frightened of her. I always have been. I feel quite brave away from her, but when she looks at me with her cold, black eyes, I feel fit to tremble."

"And you think she would object to me?"

"I don't think Maude would ever let me be engaged to anyone," confessed Eileen.

"But why? Surely she has not turned Roman Catholic, and wishes to shut you up in a convent?"

"Oh, no—but there are nine years between us."

"I should never have guessed it. Miss Desmond would pass anywhere for one or two-and-twenty!"

"She cannot bear to be thought old. Everyone about here knows she was seven or eight when my mother was married. That is why she always keeps me in the background. She speaks of me to strangers as a mere child. Now, you see if I were engaged—"

"I understand. 'Mere children' don't get engaged; but, Eileen, I think you are wrong. I don't like your sister. I never have, but I believe she would far rather you were engaged to a pauper like myself than that she should see you a peeress. I really think she would welcome the news of our betrothal, since it would make her sure you would be debarred from any very grand match."

"I would rather not."

"But, Eileen, I can't keep this from Lord Desmond! I should deserve the hardest things anyone could say of me if I wooed his daughter, and did not tell him."

She yielded the point then, only she looked at him with a kind of prophetic sadness in her eyes.

"It is all true that you say, and I daresay I am foolish, only I am so afraid of Maude. I seem to feel that trouble will come out of her knowing."

"Dear," said Basil, gently, "what trouble can come between us while we love each other?"

"I don't know—only people who love as truly as we do are parted sometimes. And I am afraid—"

"You will never do for a soldier's wife if you are so frightened!" said Basil, fondly.

"Eileen, I shall ride over early to-morrow and speak to your father. Then I hope to bring you his consent. In three days' time I shall have to go home for Lucy's wedding. When that is over I must tell my parents I have found them another daughter instead of the one they have lost."

"And if they are angry?"

Basil was pretty certain they would be, but he had no notion of letting Eileen guess this.

"They will be very fond of you when they know you, and three years will soon slip by. You are sure you will not be tired of waiting? You will be true to me, Eileen, my darling!"

"I will be true to you always!"

They might have stayed in the conservatory for hours; but Lady May, suspecting the state of affairs, and feeling some less sympathetic person might interrupt them, came herself to find Eileen, and tell her her partners were in desperation. When Eileen and her squire were moving in the mazes of a quadrille, May Delaval drew her cousin back to the terrace.

"I thought it was going to happen!" she began, without the least preamble; "but you know you have been terribly rash."

"I shall look to you, May, to help me with the home people. You will tell them Eileen is a darling, and that they must be fond of her!"

"Then it is settled!"

"I shall go and see Lord Desmond to-morrow!"

"But it can't be for years."

"I suppose not for three years; but, of course, I must speak to her father."

"I shouldn't."

"May!"

"If you were given to falling in love and repenting, I would say speak to him," said Lady May, slowly; "but as I can trust you perfectly, Basil, as I know you will be as true to Eileen as though you had already married her, I think it madness to speak to her father about an engagement that cannot come off for years."

"I don't understand you!"

"Lord Desmond is a peculiar man. He loves Eileen; but he fears Maude, so it is easy to see which sister has the most influence over him."

"But why should Maude object?"

"She hates Eileen pretty cordially; besides, she is too vain to let a sister nine years her junior be engaged first. If you were very rich, and could lavish jewels on Eileen—if you were able to give her elder sister a season in London, and the run of a country house—why, then, I think Maude would conquer her pride, and permit the marriage; but as it is, I am sure she will interfere."

"But what can she do?"

"Make mischief!" said Lady May, with a sparkle in the dark brown eyes which had done so much mischief last season.

"I can trust Eileen!"

"So can I; but, remember, there are your own family to think of. I know Aunt Constance has a slight acquaintance with Mrs. Westwood. Maude may be invited to the Grange in her aunt's train, and give a very unflattering report of Eileen."

"Do you mean she is Mrs. Westwood's niece, Cyril's cousin?" he asked, quickly.

"Even so," returned May.

"She can say nothing against her," observed Basil, doggedly; but it was clear he regretted Maude's relationship to the Westwoods.

"Nothing that weighs with us who know her; but she can represent her sister as a little hoyden, who knows nothing of ladies' society, and a bold intriguing girl, who sang at a French music-hall."

Basil winced.

"But that would reflect on herself!"

"Not at all. The whole world knows that Lord Desmond was twice married, and that all his friends were irate at his second choice. Mrs. Westwood adopted her niece only because she objected to her stepmother."

Basil shrugged his shoulders.

"I never knew you so unkind."

"That is not fair. I love Eileen dearly. I believe you could not have a fairer, sweeter wife; but I see clouds ahead, and I believe

you will rue the day you speak to Lord Desmond."

"I thought you liked him!"

"I do; but he is as weak as water!"

Everyone declared Lady Vernon's ball was a great success. It was in the small morning hours that Eileen went to bed—a strange, rapturous happiness filling her heart that Basil Courtenay loved her.

There are some natures—heaven help them if deceived—to whom love means all; who count fame or rank, wealth or luxury, as just nothing compared to love.

Such an one was Eileen Desmond. Love was the loadstone of her life. Love had changed her from a child to a woman, and her fresh, young heart had been given in its pure, first choice to Basil Courtenay.

She knew that he was poor, that years might pass before he could claim her—all this was nothing to her—all she craved was his love.

It was strange that Eileen, in her utter ignorance of worldly wisdom, and Lady May, with the prudence and quick foresight of one experienced in fashionable ways, should yet have asked Basil the same thing—not to speak to Lord Desmond of the engagement. It was stranger still that, loving Eileen as his very life, and trusting May completely, he should yet have persisted in his purpose; but Basil's obstinacy was only due to his pride and love for his little fiancée.

Honourable and upright as the day, he would not, because she was poor and unknown, cast on her even the suspicion of a slight.

He knew his love for her would stand the tests of time and absence; but she should not be placed in a false position. Her father should know she was to be Mrs. Courtenay as soon as his promotion came, and Lady Constance and Sir Brian must learn that all their plans for providing their heir with a wealthy bride were vain, since Basil had made up his mind to marry a girl whose face was her fortune.

Many of the guests breakfasted in their own rooms the morning after the ball, but Lady May was pouring out coffee in the usual place at ten o'clock; and Eileen Desmond, a shy, tremulous look of happiness in her blue eyes, sat by her friend's side.

Basil saw them thus as he came in—the girl his parents desired for a daughter-in-law, and the child they would be called on to welcome in her stead; and he told himself that in grace and sweetness, in refinement and breeding, Eileen was everything they could desire.

He sat down by her side, but several people were at the table, and he had no chance of a word on any but indifferent topics.

May Delaval, who had a wondrous feeling for lovers, waited till the meal was over, and then said pointedly to her cousin—

"I want to speak to you before you go for your ride, Basil. Come to me in my boudoir, please."

He obeyed willingly enough, and found as he expected, not the heiress, but her little friend.

"Is it really true, Eileen?" he asked fondly.

"Was it not some happy dream? Are you sure you can wait three years for a penniless soldier?"

"You must not disparage yourself like that," said Eileen. "You know you are my hero, and I shall be true to you always while you want me."

"And I may tell Lord Desmond that your happiness is in this engagement as well as mine?"

The child raised her eyes to his face, and for the last time tried to dissuade him from his purpose.

"Basil, must you tell him?"

Basil shook his head.

"Ask me anything else, my darling, and I will do it for you gladly, but not this. I cannot have the suspicion of a slight cast on you, Eileen, even at your own desire."

Frankly, Mr. Courtenay thought both Eileen and Lady May a little morbid on this

subject. As he rode over to Desmondville he argued the matter again with himself, and decided the strange fear they showed of Maude was simply prejudice.

He was willing to grant Miss Desmond disliked her little sister, and that she had some influence over her father, but it must be to her interest to see Eileen provided for. Had he trusted Maude and been on intimate terms with her, she might possibly have made mischief between him and his little love. As it was, disguising her pretty nature, and, thoroughly understanding her feeling for Eileen, he would not be influenced by anything she might say.

From Maude his thoughts went to her father.

Basil Courtenay was very much in love. He was prepared, for Eileen's sake, to brave his family's anger, and risk a life of poverty; but even for Eileen's sake he could not heartily like Lord Desmond. It seemed to him the man was weak, selfish, and cowardly. He had given up home and country for his wife's sake, but that one effort seemed to have exhausted his energy.

In nineteen years he had never done a stroke of work, and had been content for two of them to let his own child toil for his support, returned to his native land, once more Desmond of Desmondville. His pride of birth seemed to return, and he was ready to reproach the child of his exile because she was not in all things like a fashionable young lady, and to submit herself in all things to the rule of his elder daughter.

"If only we could be married now," was the result of Basil's cogitations. "I would take Eileen away, and save her any miserable discussions; but I suppose it would be madness. We must wait till I get my step, but three years won't be a very large piece of our lives after all."

He rode through the South Lodge, Mrs. Venn holding the gate open for him, and inquiring with wonderful civility after Miss Eileen.

"She's quite well," said Basil, cheerfully, "I expect you'll see her home again to-morrow."

"Take her away," said the old crone, knowingly, "and there's not much worth having left I'm thinking."

"I quite agree with you, old lady."

Mrs. Venn nodded her head, and went on in a dreary tone, more as one speaking to herself:

"But there's trouble to come of it, trouble to come of it. It runs in the blood, it runs in the blood."

Basil half shuddered at this gloomy prediction, and tried to shake off the impression it had made upon him by quickening his pace, and reaching the house at a gallop. Tony came to take the horse, and informed Mr. Courtenay my lord was in the library.

There Basil found him, the table strewn with papers and memoranda. Never a man more given to pouring over figures than Lord Desmond; the pity was his labours produced so little visible results.

He started up in astonishment at the sight of his visitor, and looked more alarmed than pleased.

"Nothing the matter at the Court, I hope? Eileen quite well?"

"Perfectly," replied Basil, quietly. "My errand is on business. I am leaving Yorkshire to-morrow."

The shadow fled from Lord Desmond's brow.

"Ah, yes. Your sister's wedding. I remember hearing of it from Eileen. It's a long journey from here to Blankshire, but I suppose, at your age, you don't mind it?"

"I could not let Lucy be married without being there if I were anywhere in England, and Blankshire is not quite the end of the world."

"Pretty near it," replied Lord Desmond. "My elder daughter is somewhere in the neighbourhood. Her aunt grew tired of

Ventnor, so they have left the Isle of Wight, and are now travelling in the south of England."

"I want to speak to you, Lord Desmond, about one of your daughters. Will you give me Eileen?"

The weary, careworn face lighted up at the sound of that favourite name.

In spite of all the misery that came afterwards Basil Courtenay always felt certain that this erring, broken-down peer, unworthy as he might be, yet really loved his youngest child.

"You want to marry Eileen!" said Lord Desmond, slowly, "and it is but the other day she was a child nursing a doll. How time passes!"

This was hardly satisfactory.

"She is not a child now," returned Basil, gravely. "Besides, unfortunately, I am not yet in a position to marry. We must wait, perhaps, three years, certainly two. All I ask now is your consent to our engagement. I have heard of your attachment to her mother. Surely you, who made a love-match yourself, cannot separate us because I am unable to give Eileen the wealth she would adorn?"

"I don't want wealth for Eileen," said Lord Desmond, slowly. "She is her mother's child, and would not value it; but I would far rather she married in a humbler position of life."

Basil stared at him.

"I hardly understand you! My father is a baronet of old family, but very slender means. You are a peer of whom the same might be said. Surely, therefore, in position Eileen and I are well matched?"

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"It killed her mother! My wife faded away, I verily believe, from the unkindness and slights heaped on her after our marriage. I want her child to have a happier fate!"

"You cannot think I would let unkindness or slights touch my wife?"

"You couldn't help it. Do you think I meant sorrow to touch my wife? Do you think I would not have given my life—though that was not worth much—to save her grief? I was powerless; and so, I believe, you would be!"

"The cases are hardly parallel!" said Basil, coldly. "You married a nursery governess. My wife will be the daughter of an English peer!"

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"My wife was the child of a brave English officer; a man who died fighting for his country, and had received the Victoria Cross. I don't think I am a parent deserving of half so much respect. I like you, Mr. Courtenay, and I don't forget you saved my daughter's life; but I am very sorry you should have come to me on such an errand!"

Basil felt indignant.

"Surely you do not expect to keep Eileen unmarried all her days because of your somewhat romantic fears for her happiness?"

"I always wished her to marry; but I believe there are only two classes of men with whom she would be happy."

"May I inquire the needful qualifications?"

"You need not be sarcastic, sir. If Eileen married a professional man with a moderate competency I believe he would win a treasure."

"I claim to be a professional man, and I hope in three years to have a moderate competency."

"But you are a baronet's son and an earl's nephew. It is impossible but that the question, 'Who was she?' should be raised about your wife. Besides, the whole world knows Sir Bryan depends on your marrying an heiress. It is my belief, from what I have gathered of your parents, they would feel aggrieved if you married an angel from heaven unless she had a substantial fortune!"

"A man cannot select his wife to please his parents. And surely you do not doubt my love for Eileen?"

"I don't. I believe you would be true to her; but if she married you I think your relations would make her feel she had ruined your prospects."

"I think you are hard on us both!"

"I am not hard on her. She is the joy of my life. And yet, if a suitable man proposed, I would give her up to-morrow."

"And the wooer is to be a plain man, of moderate income?" said Basil, sarcastically.

"Either that, or one of such wealth that he is independent of the world's opinion; and his choice, instead of being criticised and sneered at, will be run after and admired just because he has married her."

Basil Courtenay looked sharply at Lord Desmond.

"Perhaps you have such a man in your mind."

"It is possible."

"Then you send me away, not because of your scruples about Eileen's happiness, but because you have fixed on a richer son-in-law."

"You wrong me," returned Noel Desmond quietly. "To begin with, I have not sent you away."

"You have refused your consent to our engagement."

"I shall never stand in the way of Eileen's happiness. You say yourself you cannot marry her for three years?"

"Perhaps two."

"Perhaps two," corrected Lord Desmond.

"I utterly refuse to let my child be bound to you for that time—to subject her to the censure of your lady-mother, and perhaps the remonstrances of Sir Bryan. I may be poor, but, I, too, have my pride. It shall never be said I took advantage of a passing fancy to make sure of the heir of the Courtenays as a son-in-law."

"I don't understand," said Basil, hoarsely. "First you say you have not sent me away. In the next breath you declare you will not let Eileen be engaged to me."

Lord Desmond shrugged his shoulders.

"Come back when you are ready to marry her, and if she says 'Yes,' be sure I will not object, but I won't have it called an engagement."

"And if I get my promotion sooner?"

"If you get it next week, come back next week. I can't speak in plainer terms. The day you are able to marry my child that day I will consent to your engagement with her, but I will not leave her a prey to the unkind remarks of your family, and the wear-and-tear of public opinion for three long years."

"And you will be kind to her? You will not press her to give me up?"

"I was never unkind to her in my life, and I shall probably never mention this conversation to her. You can tell her so much of it as you think fit."

Basil rode back to the Court with a strange sense of disappointment. He had nerved himself to bear his mother's tears and his father's anger, when they heard of their disappointment. He had felt strong to defend Eileen from the censure he knew they would heap on her. He had been ready to describe his darling in eloquent words, and paint her beauty in glowing terms, and lo! none of this was required. He might go home without the fear of regrets and expostulations; he could fill his usual place, and receive the smiling approval always meted out to him. It would be just as though that scene in the conservatory had never been. He met May Delaval in the grounds, and a groom appearing to take his horse he followed her to the house.

"Everyone else has lunched long ago, but it is waiting for you. The mother has taken Eileen for a drive, so you need not hurry. Sit down and refresh yourself bodily, while you tell me how you have sped."

"May," said Basil, quickly. "I sometimes think you are a witch. I mean you have the most marvellous knack of guessing things no one else suspects. I want you, before I say a

word, to tell me your opinion of Lord Desmond?"

"It won't agree with yours. I like him, and you don't."

"Still, tell it me."

"I like him," said May, "because I think his is a great character spoiled by weakness. If he had met Eileen's mother, and married her when he was young, I believe he would have been a great man."

"My dear, he couldn't. When Lord Desmond married his first wife her successor was a little child."

"I know. Mother has told me how unhappy he was with Maude's mother—how for years they had no children; and when at last the little girl came, Mrs. Desmond hated her because she could not inherit the title. Mother says the fourteen years of his first marriage spoiled Lord Desmond utterly; that is why I like him. I can't help being sorry that when he had found someone to love he lost her so soon."

"He told me the slights poured out on her broke her heart, and that he won't have such a fate for Eileen. In a word, May, it is not to be an engagement at all, but if ever I am rich enough to keep a wife I may go and ask for her."

"I don't call that hard."

"May!"

"Why?" said May, sweetly. "You can trust each other. Eileen will know you are working for her, and the moment you can keep a wife you will return; and, surely, the thought of that child waiting and hoping in her quiet home will keep you true to her!"

"I shall be true to her while life lasts!"

"She is going home to-morrow, as soon as we have started for London. I will manage that you see her alone to-night."

"Heaven bless you, May!"

They stood together that evening in Lady May's own boudoir—the two who loved each other, and who hoped some day to spend their lives together.

"It seems hard," said Basil, sadly. "We should have been so happy. Your father might have trusted me."

"I trust you."

"Sweetheart!"

"And you know, Basil, I think I'm glad its like this—glad that you are not bound to me. If we had been engaged like other people—even if you had grown tired—you might have married me just because everyone expected it; but now, if you come back to me, I shall know it is because you love me."

"Why 'it,' Eileen, if you trust me?"

She clung to him a little closer.

"I do trust you, Basil, and yet I seem to feel we shall never be married. I think you know that when two people love each other as we do it would be almost too great happiness to spend their lives together."

"You trust me, Eileen, and I have faith in you. What, then, could part us?"

"I don't know."

But she was trembling, and Basil took her into his arms and kissed her, his heart just then pretty sore against Lord Desmond.

"See," said Eileen, taking a soft, creamy rose from the bosom of her dress. "I will give you this, and if ever you are tired—if ever you are sorry for what you have said to me—you shall send it back. It might be hard to write that you had changed, but if I see my rose returned I shall understand."

He took the flower and put it carefully—tenderly almost—in his pocket-book.

"It will never come back to you, sweetheart!" he said, gently. "Some day, when there is a plain gold ring on this little finger, I shall show it to you, and we shall laugh together then over your doubts."

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,065. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

Gems

WE are never tired so long as we can see far enough.

THE way to do a great deal of work is to be continually doing a little.

CALCULATION is the axis around which many seemingly generous acts revolve.

THERE is no such thing as being proud before man and humble before God.

KNOWLEDGE is a call to action; an insight unto the way of perfection is a call to perfection.

A KIND heart is a fountain of gladness, making everything in its vicinity fresher into smiles.

NOTHING is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable.

THE next time you are discouraged just try encouraging someone else and see if it will not cheer you.

IF you tell the truth, you have infinite power supporting you; but if not, you have infinite power against you.

IT is not said that after keeping God's commandments but in keeping them, there is great reward. God has linked these two things together, and no man can separate them—obedience and peace.

WHERE NAIADS SLEEP.

I know a spot where violets blue
Dashed with the clearest summer dew,
Tremble upon the water's edge,
And nestle in the softest sedge.
And sunbeams creep

Down in the deep,
Where white-souled Naiads
Dream and sleep.

And always, with their silvery drip
The drops between the ledges slip,
Where willows always bend and sway
Above the narrow waterway.
And pebbles gleam

Down in the stream,
Where Naiads always
Sleep and dream.

And softly flecked with summer sun,
Or flanked with shade, when day is done,
Where lilies open white and cool
And nodding daisies star the pool,
The constant winds

A vigil keep
Above the deep
Where Naiads sleep.

HOW THE WORLD LAUGHS.—High mentality is shown in a laugh. There are savages in Africa who never laugh; they grin, that is all; and this lack of the quality of laughter is a symptom of their low mentality. The Chinaman has no hearty bursts of laughter. He titters cynically—titters over the misfortune of an enemy or the elopement of a daughter of a friend. He cannot laugh. When he is delighted, or amused, or happy, he just looks calm. The Frenchman has a reserved laugh, one which he holds well in hand. Being a great stickler for dignity, he is afraid that a loud and honest laugh would injure his deportment, would demean him in the eyes of the world. You will not hear much laughter in Paris, though it is true that the women have a cultivated, musical "ha-ha-ha" that they use in cafés when they wish to attract somebody's attention. The German's laugh is cavernous. It comes from far down somewhere in his stomach. The laugh of the Irishman is, upon the contrary, rather soprano—not a stomach laugh, nor even a chest laugh, but a head one. The English and the Americans laugh the best. Their mirth is so naturally and heartily and musically expressed that you cannot but rejoice on hearing it.

Life Wrecked by Indigestion

CONFINED INDOORS FOR NINE YEARS.

DEBILITY AND RHEUMATISM ENSUED.

BILE BEANS RESTORED HEALTH.

Miracles are said not to occur nowadays, but this case—proved, vouched for, by neighbours—reads very like one. Mrs. Susan Harkness, the subject, lives at 76½, Kirk Street, Calton, Glasgow, and here is her story:—"For nine long years prior to last February I was not able to go out of my house! This was due to various illnesses and ailments, but right down at the bottom of them all, and causing them all, was chronic indigestion. This weakened and debilitated my whole system, and various evils resulted. My boy there has just turned nine, and about a week after he was born I began to have terrible pains in my back and chest. Month after month passed by, and, growing no better, I became alarmed, for I could not digest what food I took, was sick, weak and dizzy, and it really seemed actual torture for me to drag myself about. Housework was out of the question!



Then bilious attacks began to come on, and day after day I would be in a condition of utter helplessness. I was unable to sleep at night, but often during the day a kind of stupor would creep over me.

Added to my pain from these various ailments I then began to suffer from rheumatism. Once this body gets run down it is really surprising how many ills steal in!

For years I suffered. At times I was under doctor's treatment, and from one medical man I had sixteen bottles of medicine without getting any benefit. Things went on in this way until I tried Chas. Ford's Bile Beans.

I had only been taking them a comparatively short time when I felt that I could breathe more easily, and my limbs were becoming more pliable, as it were. I continued with the course, and the change has really been so great that I can hardly explain it.

I am like a different woman. I no longer suffer from indigestion, but am always hungry at mealtimes. I sleep well, can walk as briskly as before I fell ill, and my flesh has become firm. Any of my neighbours will tell you what Bile Beans have done for me!

Chas. Ford's Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for indigestion, biliousness, headache, debility, congestion of the liver, neuralgia, fainting fits, attacks of dizziness, flatulence, pains in the chest, loins or back, defective secretion of the bile, wasting affections, female irregularities, rheumatism, constipation, and piles.

Obtainable from all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices, 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box. 2s. 2d. box contains three times 1s. 1½d. size.

SOME people contrive to get hold of the prickly side of everything, to run against all the sharp corners and disagreeable things. Half the strength spent in grumbling would often set things right. No one finds the world quite as he would like it.

FOR OLD LOVE'S SAKE

(Novellette Concluded from page 227.)

for so many years, shook his head; for he knew that that gentle voice would be heard no more, although his patient might yet be spared some time, for her tongue was paralyzed.

In the meantime trouble had flooded Willowdene.

Some time before, Captain Jardine had given a bill of sale upon his house and furniture, to get money to pay his debts of honour, besides the large sum he had borrowed from Sir Eric Du Val.

Mrs. Jardine saw that her husband was too much broken down in mind and body to give him one reproach. Then there came to Willowdene some men to take possession of it.

Captain Jardine saw them; and, after a few minutes of conversation, he walked blindly upstairs and locked himself in his room.

His wife tried the door many times, and at length grew nervous.

She could not understand either the presence of the strangers in the house, and her heart was heavy within her.

She hesitated to trouble poor John Burton in the midst of his own great sorrow, but made up her mind to run herself over to Honour Oak Farm.

John received her with his usual kindness and affection, but looked very grave when he heard the story of the strange men in the house and the locked door.

His heart sank within him; a great dread took possession of his mind.

"Stay with my mother for me," he answered, low, "while I go and see to things. I need not remind you, dear, that she can hear, though she cannot speak, and so I know you will not let any word fall which might distress her. We shall not have her long, but while we have I should like her to have no sorrow"; and, pressing Mrs. Jardine's hand, he led her to his mother's room.

"Mother, dear, here is a kind friend come to sit with you," he said. "No, it is not Miss Maylie, although it is about her time to come. It is Mrs. Jardine."

The feeble hand was outstretched, and John slipped away, running all the way to Willowdene.

At the door he stopped—a sickly fear of entering seeming to overpower him, but he pulled himself together and went in.

He soon learnt the story of the bill of sale, and, going up the stairs, he knocked repeatedly upon Mr. Jardine's door, but, receiving no answer, he broke it open.

The unhappy man sat beside a table, upon which his arms were resting, and his head was drooped upon them.

There was something in the attitude which suggested sleep, but, sad to say, it was the last sleep of death.

Frank Jardine had been going the pace too fast altogether, and had come to utter grief. Knowing this, he had not the manhood to face the terrible position and begin again—a beggar.

Who can tell what agony of soul drove him on to the fatal act he had committed? Upon the table was an empty chlorodyne bottle, and Frank Jardine was dead.

Even the rough men below stairs were shocked and awed by the dread shadow which had so silently stepped in among them. And Cecil Jardine, arriving in answer to his mother's distressing letter, was distracted with grief.

Trouble was so new to him and so hard to bear that poor John Burton's hands were fell.

When he could persuade him to rest quietly for a little time, he hastened over to the Vicarage and asked the Vicar and gentle Rhoda Maylie to go over and take charge of the headstrong youth, while he went to break the fatal news to the poor widow.

Rhoda and her adopted father went at once and got Cecil to return to the Vicarage with them—the girl's sympathy and kindness soothing his excitement wonderfully.

To her he told his fears for his sister Clare, and her answer came like a cool hand upon his heated brow.

"Why should you fear for Clare?" she asked, out of the innocence of her own white heart. "She has been brought up by a good mother and will not forget the lessons taught by her. Clare may have acted foolishly, but she cannot have done wrong."

"I will believe as you believe, Rhoda," answered Cecil, warily. "You comfort me about my sister, but my father—"

He left off with a broken voice.

"Your father may not have intended to take so much. Chlorodyne is very soothing, you know, and he may scarcely have known in his troubles what he was about, and so the accident may have occurred."

"You are a dear good girl, Miss Maylie. Now tell me what I ought to do. I cannot remain on in the expensive regiment I am in. I am in debt already, and with this family history I could not return among my brother officers."

"No, do not do so. They have, I think, led both you and your father astray. Exchange regiments and go to India. Tell John Burton about your debts, he will help you, he is so very, very good."

"He is. He has helped me much already. I will tell him all."

This young girl's sensible advice sunk into Cecil's heart.

He looked at the sweet face which, although not beautiful, had a beauty all its own—the beauty of goodness—and a determination entered his mind to try and win her for his wife in the far-off future.

He was not so wrong-headed as to intend to bind her to him with any promise, but he thought Rhoda would be like a bright star on a dark night in his sky to guide him to a better life.

On his way back to Honour Oak Farm, John went to the village nurse and bade her go to Willowdene, and he also sent the doctor, although he knew that his services were no longer of any avail, begging him to undertake to give due notice for the necessary inquest.

Then he returned to his home with slow footsteps and a heavy heart.

The task before him was a most painful one, and he hardly felt fit to go through with it.

Coming out of the sunshine of happiness and satisfied love into the sudden desolation, was almost too much for even the brave spirit of honest John Burton.

Mrs. Jardine saw him pass the window.

Mrs. Burton was asleep, and she slipped from the room.

He walked into his comfortable dining-room, and opened his arms for her.

"Mother," he said, brokenly. "You were to have been my mother, you know, and it is neither your fault nor mine that it is not to be, but I shall ever love you just the same. Think of me as your son, dear. I promise before Heaven that I will be one to you. Mother, from now your home will be with me; and in the days that are coming shall thank Heaven for giving me another mother, for I shall not have mine with me long."

There was a look of pathetic terror in Mrs. Jardine's eyes.

"My home here! Oh! John, what do you mean?"

"Mother, how can I tell you?"

She closed the door.

"John, John, has anything awful happened?" and she held him so tightly that it bruised his flesh.

"Do not ask, my dear, I cannot tell you—not now, not now. Mother, neither you nor I can bear much more to-day."

"John," she whispered, "surely, surely, he is not dead?"

"Ay, dear, he has passed away from all

troubles here, and will find a more merciful judge there than any in an earthly court," he answered her, solemnly.

"Dead!" she murmured, as her fingers relaxed their hold, and she slipped from his arms to the floor in a swoon.

He looked down upon the prostrate form with his breast full of pity. Then, lifting her, he laid her gently upon the sofa, and went to seek restoratives.

CHAPTER X.

Clare Jardine knew nothing of the terrible troubles which had taken place at "Willowdene," nor had she the faintest idea that it had passed into the hands of strangers.

On the night on which she left her home, she went out into the world with the man she loved, his promised wife.

Sir Eric had a carriage waiting at a little distance along the road, which took them to a railway station where Clare had never been, and was not known, and they travelled to London; and leaving her there in a suite of rooms, he promised to see her as often as he could, but explained that he would not take his regimental leave until the time of their marriage, when they would go to Scotland together.

She agreed to his wishes, but it was very lonely for her in her London lodging.

However, he kept his promise of running up to see her often, and when the three Sundays had been spent in London, they were married.

It was a very different sort of wedding to that which Clare had pictured for herself. The newly-opened church was close, stuffy, and melancholy looking.

There were no onlookers at all, save the people in connection with the church, whose duty it was to be there.

It was an old-fashioned edifice, and the gloom cast a shadow over the girl's feelings.

As she entered the building upon Sir Eric's arm, a great trembling seized upon her.

"Oh! Eric," she murmured, "what a dreadful old place! And I have thought of my wedding as such a bright affair."

"So it is bright, darling, since it binds us together. It matters little whether the service is performed in a cathedral or a barn, so long as we are happy together. Come, cheer up, little one, for your old Eric loves you with all his heart, and he thinks you reciprocate his affection truly."

"I do. Have I not proved it?" she murmured.

"Yes, sweetheart! and I will do my best to make you happy. Never mind about the lack of bridesmaids and an admiring throng; as to the pretty dresses, the costume you wear is lovely, and you may order just as many as ever you like."

Clare was attired in silver-grey corded silk, trimmed richly with ostrich feathers of a delicate pink, and crêpe to match, and her bonnet was of the same shades and materials.

It certainly did not look like a wedding dress, but it would have been a rarely elegant garden-party or flower-show toilet, and the girl looked sweetly pretty in it.

There, in that gloomy church, Clare promised to be true until death to the man she loved, without one thought of the aching heart of honest John Burton.

The bride and bridegroom drove in a hired brougham to the hotel where Sir Eric had put up the night before, and they enjoyed a very recherche little dinner together, picked up Clare's luggage at her lodging, and drove to the railway station.

Sir Eric had taken great pains in his choice of a home for his darling, which he gave her for her own as a wedding present in a "deed of gift."

That home was all her fancy had ever pictured.

It was standing upon high ground, with a great blue mountain in the distance behind, and the purple heather-clad moor coming down to the cultivated land which formed her garden.

Upon the right stood a great brown crag of rock, against which the sea burst in silver

crested, storm-tossed waves, flinging the white foam with an angry roar high up the rugged brown surface.

The cottage itself was exquisite; built with many gables of grey stone and coloured glass windows, with a verandah all around, up the pillars of which grew beautiful climbing flowers and evergreens.

French windows opened out on to a lawn as soft as plush, bordered with flower-beds rich with jewel-like blossoms; then there was a terrace walk overlooking the broad, blue ocean, at the end of which was a winding avenue of blue pine trees, relieved by the tender green of the larch, which wound down the hill side to the beach below, where stood boat-houses containing boats of various sizes.

A more perfect spot could scarcely have been mentally imagined than "Glenmoir," the exquisite home to which Sir Eric Du Val brought his bonnie young bride.

Their honeymoon passed but too swiftly, and in it they had nothing left to desire. They had a lovely tennis ground, boating, and as much riding and driving as they liked, and during those two months of perfect happiness they were never apart.

It was all that Clare had pictured in her early day-dreams, and she gave a little sigh of delicious satisfaction as she thought how fully all her wishes had been realised.

She was then sitting in a luxurious lounging chair upon the terrace overlooking the sea, and Sir Eric was close by her side in another. She turned and saw a cloud upon his brow, and placed her small hand upon his.

"Eric, what is it?" she asked, with a sudden fear. "Are you not happy with me?"

"With you! ay, truly dear; but I was just thinking how wretched I shall be apart from you."

"Apart from me?" and she regarded him with startled eyes.

"Yes! that is my trouble. Clare, I cannot always be on leave, you know. I am a soldier, and must attend to my duty."

"Ah! how sorry I shall be to leave here, Eric, dear," she answered, softly; "but, after all, it cannot matter much, so long as we are together;" and she laid her head upon his shoulder lovingly.

"Don't make it harder for me; you will break my heart if you speak like that. We can't always be together, darling; and I told you long ago that I had a trouble into which no one could enter. I must return to the regiment alone; but I hope my pet will be happy in her home. You may be sure I shall always be thinking of my dear, wee wife, and I will write to her daily; and I will fly to her the moment I can get away, as a bird to its mate. Clare! Clare, for Heaven's sake don't look like that. What ails you, my darling?"

"Eric, are you ashamed of your choice?" she inquired, turning a very white face towards him.

"No, a thousand times no, little love!"

"Then why cannot you take me with you? Eric, what is your secret?"

"He caught her in his arms. "It would be a secret no longer if I told you, sweet one. Don't be childish. Be content with knowing you have the love of my heart."

But Clare was not content, and very bitter to her was the parting with her husband. He kept his promise, and wrote to her very often; moreover, he paid her many flying visits.

It was a great trouble to her that she could not take up her position in the world as his wife, and that he still forbade her writing to her parents.

She inquired for her brother, Cecil, and was startled by Sir Eric's reply that he had exchanged regiments and gone to India.

Clare had lived two years in her lonely little home when her great life-trouble came.

Sir Eric was with her again. His love for her seemed greater than ever, and he was talking of leaving the service, and giving up the world to share Clare's little Eden, when one

of his servants came to tell him that two ladies were caught by the tide behind the "Mohr," the name by which the great brown rock was known, and that they would assuredly be drowned if help was not rendered them.

Sir Eric was ready in a moment. He said he would pull round the "Mohr" himself and pick up the ladies, who, he was informed, had been sketching round the coast, and Clare decided to go with him.

The boat was soon upon the waves, and Sir Eric took one of his men to render assistance. The act of rescue was as simple as A B C; nevertheless, in a quarter of an hour the two ladies would have lost their lives, for the tide at that corner rose with extraordinary rapidity, and was too fierce and strong to combat.

As Sir Eric helped the second lady into the boat a stifled exclamation fell from his lips, and Clare saw that his face was ashen-hued. It was evident these two had met before.

"Eric," said the lady, "it is strange that you should save me. I am afraid you would rather not have known I was there!"

The speaker was a tall, fine woman of a somewhat masculine type, and very plain. There was not a touch of softness or gentleness about her. She was thoroughly matter-of-fact, stern, and unsympathetic, but she was just.

The lips of Sir Eric moved, but no sound issued from them, and there was a look of agony in his eyes.

"Lady Anna," continues she, turning to her companion, "you have often wished to know my phantom husband, and now I can introduce you to him. Lady Anna Deering, Sir Eric Du Val!"

There was a cry, low and heartrending, and Clare fell forwards white as death.

"What ails the child?" inquired she, coldly. "For the love of heaven be silent!" he prayed. "Say what you will to me when we are alone!"

She obeyed him, and when Sir Eric had carried his poor wounded white dove to her cot, and left her with her maid, he descended with hard set features to the drawing-room, where the two ladies awaited him.

"Lady Anna is my friend, you can speak freely before her," she said. "What have you been doing? No good, I fear. I never imagined for one moment that you had the faintest feeling towards me. I knew perfectly that we decided to marry to secure to ourselves the vast fortune which your ridiculous old uncle left to a lunatic asylum if we declined to carry out his wishes. He was only fit for an inmate when he made such a will. We agreed to marry, and to part at the church door, which we did, and until to-day I never have had the pleasure of seeing you again. My life has been an open book. Lady Anna has been my daily and hourly companion, and we have enjoyed my money vastly. Now, I ask, what have you been doing, Eric? I have the right to know that!"

"Georgina, I throw myself on your mercy," he faltered.

"Ah! I thought so. You have ruined the life of that mere child!"

"I married her!"

"Pshaw! you couldn't marry her!"

"Georgina, I loved her with all my heart. I would have given up all my fortune for her sake!"

"Loved her, yet you spoil her life! Rubbish! I don't believe in such love. Leave her this very hour, and I will not blazon this affair abroad. Remain here, and I will myself report your conduct to the Horse Guards. You know whether His Majesty would retain you in the Army. You are the last man, I think, to face disgrace. I will see the poor child safe back among her people!"

"People! She has only a mother in England."

"All the better for her."

"My poor Clare! she will break her heart!"

"Not she. Hearts don't break. I have let you off very cheap!"

"This house is her own," continued Sir Eric, "and I settled enough money on her to keep it up. Let her stay here if she will."

"Certainly; but, of course, she won't when she knows the truth."

It was a long time before poor Clare did know the truth.

She had brain fever, and went quite off her head for many months, and Sir Eric's real wife nursed her all through her illness, with no tenderness, but with a strong sense of justice. And when Clare rightly understood matters, her nurse wore widow's weeds; for Sir Eric's regiment had gone to South Africa, and he had been killed in a skirmish.

Lady Du Val smiled a hard smile as she read of him in a paper as an honourable gentleman and gallant soldier. His gallantry was undoubted, but, with that poor broken flower upstairs, she could not admit his honour.

When Clare was well enough she heard the whole truth from Lady Du Val; and declining to remain at Glenmoir or to accept her help or assistance, she went to London, and from thence on to Willowdene.

CHAPTER XI.

It was long before Mrs. Jardine in the least got over the fearful shock of the disappearance of her daughter, the tragic death of her husband, and the loss of her home.

John Burton proved more than a son to her in her great trouble, and she did her best to repay him by most tenderly caring for his mother, to whom she proved the greatest comfort; and although the poor soul could not speak, she managed to make those two who loved her comprehend all her wishes, one of which was that Mrs. Jardine should never leave her son, but be a mother to him; and John and she promised that it should be so.

Just one year after her arrival at Honour Oak Farm Mrs. Burton quietly passed away with both their hands in hers, and a radiant smile upon the wan worn features.

Poor John lay with his head bent against his dead mother's pillow, the picture of despair. She had been so very much to him, and he felt unequal to the task of saying "Thy will be done."

Her very weakness and dependence upon him made her more dear, and he felt this second blow coming upon the other overwhelmingly.

He had two comforters in his sorrow, Mrs. Jardine and Rhoda Maylie, who had been as a daughter to Mrs. Burton for many years.

The old Pastor of Honour Oak did not outlive John's mother very long; and as the farmer was sitting by his bedside Rhoda came in to bring him some beef-tea. When she had retired again, the Vicar looked at John searchingly.

"That is a good girl, Burton," he said.

"I am sure of it," he answered, warmly.

"No one could look in her face and doubt it."

"She will make a splendid wife!" continued the old man. "John, I know about your disappointment, and fear it was a bitter one."

"It was," he answered, shortly. "I loved Clare with all my heart."

"Ay, lad, but how few folks marry their first love. Rhoda would make you happy, and I am sure she cares for you. Remember, when I am gone she will be homeless."

"I will give her a home with pleasure," said John, gravely. "She can be a daughter to Mrs. Jardine, but I shall never marry now. When a man clean gives away his heart he can't get it back again, and where Clare is there it will be. With such a pretty face and winsome way, Miss Maylie need not be long without a sweetheart."

Rhoda's adopted father told her what John had said, and her cheeks blanched, but otherwise she was calm.

She declined John Burton's offer of a home, and went as governess to a rich family in the neighbourhood; and soon after she heard from Cecil Jardine, who told her of the great affection he had for her, and the hope he had of

winning her one day, and how that hope kept him in the right road, and Rhoda began to take a strong interest in the young soldier, a fact that Mrs. Jardine encouraged for both their sakes.

She felt that Cecil would brighten Rhoda's life, while she would help him to be a good man with her sweet gentle ways; and John smiled as he heard them talk together, satisfied that it would end in a happy union one day.

It was a beautiful summer evening, and John Burton, somewhat tired with his day of haymaking, was sitting under the verandah, absently smoking; but he was in a thoughtful mood, and his pipe had gone out long before.

Mrs. Jardine was sitting just within the window, and her busy fingers were at rest for once in her lap.

The twilight was coming on, and in the blue arch of heaven a pin-prick of the brightness above was peeping through.

Both were thinking of the dear ones who had passed through the doors of death, and it seemed as if the gates were still ajar, so near they felt to be to them.

Then it was of Clare they thought. It was the mother who breathed her name.

"It was a night just like this, John," she said, "when Clare went away. Was it not wondrous strange what became of her? Perhaps she is dead. I have often thought it must be so, since she has never written to me."

"No, no, she is not dead, or my heart would tell me so. Mother, one day Clare will come back. I have pictured her return so often that I find it difficult to unravel truth from fancy. Even now I could believe I heard her light footstep upon the gravel path."

"Ah! that is only fancy, John. And if she were to come?" she questioned, brokenly.

"Ay, if she were, mother, we should give her a loving welcome. Should we not?"

"If Oh, yes. But you, John—you? Could you forgive her?"

"I reckon God has a longer score against me than I can have against Clare," he answered, low.

"But, John, if someone has wronged her—" and the mother's voice broke with a sudden pain.

"I would break every bone in his cowardly body!"

There was a rustle among the bushes hard by, and a slight sable clad figure stood before them.

"If he lived, John; if he lived," she murmured; "but he has gone to answer before a higher tribunal than any which could be convened here for his sin. John—mother—I have come home. Can you forgive me?" and she sank down upon her knees before them.

It was John Burton who raised her so tenderly, and they led her in and closed the French windows for greater privacy.

Then Clare confessed to them all the truth; how she had loved Sir Eric Du Val and deceived them for years, and ran away with him; of her great happiness, broken into by his leaving her; of her discovery of his treachery; of the real Lady Du Val's conduct, Sir Eric's desertion of her, and early death upon the battlefield.

Then for a few moments there was silence.

"Poor child!" said John, pitifully. "You have paid dearly for your own way. We will let you have rest and peace now. I will not torment you with my love; but Clare, it is yours as it has always been, and if you ever wish to fulfil your engagement I shall be ready. We cannot quarrel now as to whether my mother shall live with us; but, remember, I will never part with yours."

Clare was very humble. She stooped and kissed the great brown, sunburnt hand at which she had laughed in former days.

She was altogether heartbroken, and the news she had learnt at "Willowdene" from strange lips had been the last straw on the camel's back.

John troubled her with no love-making as of yore, but strove to please her in all things, studying her every wish and whim.

More than a year later Cecil returned from India on leave, and lost no time in proposing to Rhoda Maylie, who, having told him of her first fancy for John Burton, was forgiven, and the two were very happy.

Clare was sitting with a little jewel-box in her hand, and thinking herself alone, she took from it two rings—her old engagement-ring with John, and its keeper.

He entered much as he had done the day their engagement was broken off, and stood before her.

"I have often wondered what you did with those, Clare," he said, smiling at her.

"I couldn't send them back, John," she faltered.

"Why not, when you had given me up?"

"Ah! I do not know. I couldn't. The human heart is curiously inconsistent. I often looked at them when I was lonely, and thought of you and all your goodness to me, John," and there were tears in the long-fringed lashes.

He stooped over her.

"Shall I put them on again, Clare?" he asked.

"Is it possible you can wish it?"

"Yes! You are the only woman who can ever be my wife."

"John," she whispered, "I love you now as I never thought to love anyone; not because you are charming, rich, or handsome, but because I know you to be honest as the day and good as tried gold," and she held up her finger for the ring.

"Let the dead past bury its dead, darling. And from now let us begin life afresh together, remembering that we are not children to toy with duty, but earnest men and women, who have much to do before we gain our rest."

"You shall lead me, John," she answered, low, as his arm clasped once more around her; and she found a haven of refuge upon the heart which she had saddened, which had beat only for her so long.

There was a double wedding at the little old ivy-clad church, where Rhoda's adopted father's voice was wont to be heard, and the village folks smiled to think the children who had grown up among them were made happy at last.

Clare's story was never known, and bold would that man have been who ventured to question honest John Burton about his wife.

[THE END.]

IF I KNEW.

If I knew the box where the smiles were kept,

No matter how large the key

Or strong the bolt, I would try so hard

'Twould open, I know, for me.

Then over the land and sea broadcast,

I'd scatter the smiles to play,

That the children's faces might hold them

fast

For many and many a day.

If I knew the box that was large enough

To hold all the frowns I meet,

I would like to gather them, every one,

From the nursery, school, and street;

Then folding and holding, I'd pack them in,

And, turning the monster key,

I'd hire a giant to drop the box

To the depths of the deep, deep sea.

"WHAT were you doing at the time of your arrest?" asked the magistrate of the prisoner.

"I was waiting." "Waiting for whom?"

"Just waiting." "What were you waiting for?"

"To get my money." "Who from?"

"The man I was waiting for." "What did he give it to you for?"

"For waiting." "I don't know what you mean. Explain yourself."

"I thought you knew I was a waiter in a restaurant."

"Oh!" gasped the magistrate.

Facetiæ

"Do you think they'll marry?" "Circumstances point in that direction. Her people object, and he's as poor as a church mouse."

"What is the best powder for babies?" asked the woman. "Cunpowder!" absently replied the druggist, who had been up all night with his own.

Mrs. GROWELL: "Don't you think a club for women would be a blessing in this part of town?" Growell: "Sure thing. A club, a sandbag, or something like that."

"Some men," said Willie Washington, "act like perfect fools when they are in love." "Yes," answered Miss Cayenne, "and a great many more do not wait even for that excuse."

LULU: "Yes, I was introduced to him yesterday, and he told me I was the prettiest woman he had ever met." Celie: "Ah, you see, I was only introduced to him this morning."

Mrs. TOONICE (as Willie backs away from the dinner-table): "Now, what do you say, dear?" Willie (after a hard think): "My! it's so long since we had company before, I've clean forgot."

FIRST DECORATOR: "I advised him to have his house decorated during his wife's absence as a surprise." Second Decorator: "Good! Then we'll have to do it all over again when she gets back."

"I AM going to marry your daughter, sir," said the positive young man to the father. "Well, you don't need to come to me for sympathy," replied the father; "I have troubles of my own."

FILIAL YOUTH (hesitating, being fearful of breaking the parental heart): "Well, mother, I've volunteered. We're off to the Front next week." Spartan Mother: "How many shirts will you want, my boy?"

SHE: "Jim and I hope you'll have a pleasant journey, mother." Jim: "Yes. Just think, in seven minutes from now you'll either be safely through the tunnel, or else be lying somewhere mangled beyond recognition."

"THERE, now, Clara, how would you like to be those people who can't get home from Paris because their funds gave out?" "Well, dear me, Clarence, they are better off than we, whose funds gave out before we started."

CHOLLY: "I nevah see such a queer girl. While I was calling there the other evening she made me pet her pug dog, and asked me if I didn't want to kiss the beast." Miss Pepprey: "The idea! Perhaps she doesn't know that you smoke cigarettes."

"Now," said the Sunday-school teacher, in her most winning tones, "which little boy can tell us about the still small voice that is within us?" "Please'm," said the freckled boy at the end of the seat, "my uncle has one." "Has he?" "Yes'm. He's a ventriloquist."

TOWNE: "My wife used to get nervous every time she heard a noise downstairs, but I assured her that it could not be burglars, because they're always careful not to make any noise." Browne: "So that calmed her, eh?" Towne: "Not much. Now she gets nervous every time she doesn't hear any noise."

CHOLLY (proudly): "By Jove! I'm quite a professor of swimming, don't you know. I taught Mabel Gayley how to swim in two lessons." Jack: "Gad! that was a quick throw-down." Cholly (indignantly): "What do you mean?" Jack: "Why, she let me give her ten lessons before she learned."

LONG: "Say, Short, I'd like to have that ten dollars you borrowed of me three months ago." Short: "Sorry, old man, but I can't give it you at the present writing." Long: "But you said you wanted it for a little while only." Short: "Well, I gave it to you straight. I didn't keep it half an hour."

A DESPERATE DEED

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Harold, Earl of Silverdale, is spending the Christmas holidays at Woodville Honour. His host, Sir Stuart Woodville, has twin daughters, Lillian and Marguerite, who bear such a striking resemblance to each other that a stranger finds it extremely difficult to distinguish between them. Marguerite has already a dark page in her young life; while Lillian has given her maiden confidence and love to the Earl, and a marriage is speedily arranged. The Earl and Countess of Silverdale are returning from their honeymoon, and, while staying in London for a few days, a telegram reaches the Earl, stating that his daughter Iva, by his first wife, has been injured in a fire. The Earl at once leaves for Belgium. During his absence Lillian agrees with Marguerite to return quietly to their Sussex home. They are detained on the way owing to an accident. Lillian is mistaken a second time for Marguerite by Reuben Garratt who holds her sister's secret. He had followed Lillian to her room at the hotel, and she, terrified at his threats, is powerless to say a word, when he fires, and she falls lifeless. Marguerite, finding the body a little later, takes in the situation at a glance, and determines that she, Marguerite Woodville, is dead, and that Lillian, Countess of Silverdale, still lives. Marguerite's (as we will continue to call her) first interview with the Earl passes off successfully. Reuben Garratt, finding her an easy prey (but still believing her to be Lillian), determines to throw her child by Sir Geoffrey Damyn on her hands. Sir Geoffrey, to Marguerite's consternation, visits her husband. Sir Geoffrey is staggered by what he regards as the resemblance between Marguerite and Lillian. The Earl is greatly concerned at the strange behaviour of the Countess, and many things have happened to arouse his suspicions and to cause uneasiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE snow and the silence came down together." There had not been such a December in Sussex for years—such cold, such snow. There would surely be skating.

The afternoon had darkened down. Kettle-drum was over. There was no attempt to dress for the early and informal dinner.

And now there was no sound in the Castle save the occasional twang of musicians tuning their instruments.

For all the guests, as well as the inmates of the household, were closeted in their dressing-rooms.

And still, unceasingly, soft as rose petals, pure as a girl's first love-dream, the snow came down.

My lady smiled. She sat in her dressing-gown before the great gold-bound mirror.

Her maid was twisting the pretty curly hair into an artistically-rebellious mass above the small head.

But it was not contentment with her own beauty which curved so charmingly the red young mouth.

Had not Harold told her an hour ago, watching her more closely than she imagined all the time, that Geoffrey Damyn had asked him for Iva?

When, on a former occasion, driving home from Rothlyn together, he had suggested the probability of such an occurrence, she had cried out in shocked dissent.

But now, all at once, it had flashed on her that Iva was to be the price of his silence. She imagined it was that day Geoffrey had spoken, whereas it really was before he had recognised her at all.

But if he were to marry Iva, his lips would be sealed for ever. He could not then degrade her without branding himself.

She had looked up at the Earl.

"I am very glad to hear it."

Endeavouring so earnestly to conceal her delight—for the fact that Iva might refuse him had not dawned on her—her voice sounded peculiarly constrained.

Lord Silverdale, with ears grown jealously keen, detected the false ring. He misconstrued it.

She was striving to dissemble, and she could not do it; her voice betrayed her. His information had been a blow.

"You have changed your mind about it, then, Lillian?"

"Yes."

There was certainly no more to say. He went away more sullen-browed than ever, though this she did not perceive.

And she delivered herself to her maid, and sat smiling abstractedly while that painstaking person twisted in and around her dark crown of hair the slender golden wire, all set with diamonds, which, in the Silverdale jewels, took the place of the awkward tiara.

Did a pang of pity for her stepdaughter cross her mind? She had been very anxious to save her from him until to-day; but now he must be kept dumb at any cost.

And surely Iva would consent. She was feverishly eager now that she should do so. What could be her reason for rejecting him? He was young, good-looking, blue-blooded, wealthy.

Mechanically she dressed. She did not even glance at herself in the glass when her toilet was completed.

She took up her fan, a priceless toy, all point and pearl and gems, which had belonged to La Pompadour.

She went out, along the upper hall, down the grand stairway. She was the first to descend, evidently.

Just under the niched statue of a marble Minerva she paused, looked below. What a fairyland it all was!

The brilliant, spacious, deserted rooms, which would echo so soon to the music's strain and the beat of dancing feet; under the mantels, which were the pride of the Castle—ebony, Carrara, and even malachite, each bearing a medallion blazoned with the Silverdale arms—cheery red fires burned in beds of polished steel.

The noiseless tread of trained servants came and went. Now and then sounded from

the ball-room a snatch of melody from "violin, flute and bassoon."

Everywhere was holly, ivy, mistletoe, chapleting the mailed guards at the foot of the stairway, wreathing the columns of the vestibule. And everywhere, too, were flowers, choice hot-house blooms—banks of them, screams of them, picturesquely careless masses of them.

There was the lustre and warmth of costly draperies, the glitter of gold plate and crystal in the banqueting hall, the musical plash of perfumed waters, and in the dim conservatory the frozen beauty of rare statuary and the grace and greenery of stately palms.

And she, the discarded love of Captain Geoffrey Damyn, was the lady of the Castle and the mistress of it all!

Her heart thrilled exultantly at the thought. With her dark, bediamonded head unconsciously held a little higher than usual, she passed on down the remaining steps, through the long drawing-room.

With no definite object, just taking a pleased survey of it all, she traversed the quiet room.

Who was that there?

Suddenly she paused.

Lillian!

Then she actually laughed aloud, for it was her own reflection which had startled her.

The wall directly ahead was panelled with a series of sunken mirrors, with pillars of carved and fluted ebony intervening.

She stood there quite a long time, simply looking at the picture which the glistening surface presented.

She had never dreamed, she told herself frankly and without the slightest vanity, that she was half so pretty.

But that was not the word at all. It did not express enough. Far more than pretty was the vision there.

Look for yourself. A small but perfectly proportioned little creature, clad in a rich and simple gown of fair and shining satin. Save

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for the long Suede gloves, the slender but rounded arms were bare.

A quaint puff capped the shoulders. The corsage, pointed back and front and ruffled with exquisite Honiton, showed to perfection the smooth throat, around which flashed and sparkled the splendid Silverdale diamonds. They clasped the laces of her gown, they quivered like drops of sun-kissed dew from her pink ears, and the dusky hair, so deftly had Jane fulfilled her task, seemed literally powdered with the white flecks of flame.

But her jewels were scarcely brighter than the grey, shining eyes; and the cheeks, which had grown so thin of late, were the tint of June carnations.

She roused herself and moved away. It was delightful to be young and rich and beautiful. She was hardly that, though, she thought. Iva was beautiful.

How quickly she must have dressed! None of the others had yet come down.

Still in a smiling reverie, she lightly went on into the lantern-lit conservatory. Through the domed and fragrant place, trailing her shimmering satin behind her, languidly she walked.

How hushed the air! Never a sound save the silver drip of the fountains. How warm the place! How full of heavy, subtle perfume!

She felt tired, but her weariness was half a sensation of rest.

She sank down on a rustic seat, leaned back. Then she became conscious of a gaze fastened upon her.

Almost against her will she looked up. Directly opposite, looking aristocratic and handsome in traditional evening costume, stood Sir Geoffrey Damyn!

The Countess half rose. Then she nodded in careless, friendly fashion, and sank back in her seat. She must not let him see the prospect of a tête-à-tête disturbed her.

He bowed low. But there was a boldness, a recklessness in his glance she did not like to encounter.

"I hardly hoped for this opportunity of speaking alone to your ladyship."

The tone was studiously respectful. She bowed coldly.

If he must speak, let him do so now, and get it over. Better than if there were others around.

"If I have time before the festivities begin I would like to tell you a story—possibly," as she would have interrupted him, "one you have heard before."

He was very pale; his voice sounded strange and stern. Again she inclined the proud, dark head, lit with flashes of prisoned light.

"A few years ago—a very few years ago," he began, "a certain young officer in one of Her Majesty's regiments met and fell in love with a captivating child."

Heavens! how queer it was that he, Geoffrey Damyn, should be coolly standing here, under her husband's roof, telling her that tale!

But she made no sign.

"A plucky one, on my soul!" the man said to himself.

But he had laid out his work. It was cut and dried for him. He must proceed.

He was poor, but had expectations. Such also was her position. But they loved each other—the foolish pair!—they really did."

He laughed harshly. The Countess felt her heart beating loud and fast. Had he any particular purpose in this recital? Or was it only a piece of maliciousness from first to last?

"So they were secretly married," pursued the slow, cynical, weary voice. "They went away to an insignificant sea-coast town. And they were blissfully, nonsensically, absurdly happy for six short weeks."

There was a quiver in the final, languidly-spoken words.

Real or feigned? Who could tell?

The Countess sat up more straightly. It was choking her, that quick, fierce throbbing in her side.

He leaned against the huge majolica pedes-

tal whereon stood a pink and blossoming oleander.

The Countess stirred impatiently. He observed the movement.

"I shall not keep you much longer. Well, she went back to town—he to his regiment. He was soon to sail for Calcutta. The parting would be bitter; but, after all, why should he fear it? Would he not leave behind him a true heart, a loving heart, a loyal heart? And how sweet would be his welcome home?"

How dare he tell her this! Did he for one instant suppose she would believe it? Was he trying to clear himself now to her—to her who knew him—that, without opposition from him, he might marry Lord Silverdale's daughter? How dare he? But let him finish as he had commenced.

She shut her teeth tightly, and said no word.

But the day after their return to London he heard—no matter how—that she whom he had loved and honoured enough to make his wife was faithless!

Such a plausible fabrication! Paltry, too, though!

She fairly sickened. It was carrying fraud too far—that he should try to deceive her. The story would stand no test—would not hold water, as the old saying goes. But if he could succeed in cramming it down her throat, she would not influence Iva Romaine against him. What a farce?

A thorough contempt thrilled her.

He did not look like a man who was lying. He was as white as his expansive shirt bosom. His blonde, dark-eyed face was weary to sadness.

But it was all of a piece, she told herself, angrily—all a very clever bit of acting. She could do fairly well in that line herself.

For the first time since he had begun his narrative, she honoured him with an appearance of interest.

Slowly she lifted her lashes, and let her gaze rest on him.

It would have been a stupid man indeed—and Sir Geoffrey Damyn was anything but that—who failed to comprehend all that glance implied.

He did not quail under its half-smiling, half-scornful incredulity.

"Faithless," he reiterated, "yes."

Ten feet away the leaves of a banana-tree rustled. But neither heard.

She smiled faintly.

"Is it worth while telling such a romance to me?"

Her speech was very gentle. But the words stung.

"Why not?" he flared out. "Who has a better right to hear?"

She rose. If he was going to insult her outright—to keep her here like a bayed animal—

Hark!

Again the leaves rustled. And now she heard. She could see no one in the swift glance she sent around.

A guest might easily, though, enter unperceived by the other arch. She must be careful. She must betray nothing.

"He didn't believe it, of course," dropping into his customary tired way of talking, as though speech was hardly worth the necessary trouble; "in fact, he thrashed the man who told him of it within an inch of his life. But it was true, all the same."

"True!"

In spite of herself she echoed it.

It could not—could not be! And yet if by an amazing blunder he had really thought so—

All capability for calm, judicious reasoning was gone. Her head was in one wild whirl.

"He proved it!"

She recoiled backward. One hand, outflung,

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caught for support at the chair from which she had just risen.

Proved it! What was he saying? Oh, it was impossible! She could not ask. Her eyes dilated till the pupils looked unnaturally large and black. The look questioned him. In it was fear, dismay, and a wild hope.

It was his turn to smile bitterly.

"Is it worth while to feign ignorance?" he queried, coldly.

She took a step forward. Her diamonds caught the light and blazed.

"For Heaven's sake!"

The appeal was fairly panted. He stared, shrugging his shoulders.

If she insisted, very well!

Under the rosy beauty of the oleander blooms he leaned his elbow on the pedestal, his head on his hand.

"He followed her one evening. She met, by appointment undoubtedly, a good-looking young fellow. They entered a cab, and were driven to a shabby part of the city. The cab stopped at a lodging-house. They entered. They did not emerge that night."

The Countess did not seem to breathe. No statue of stone in the greenery was more still, more silent than she.

But out of her face had gone its glow, its youth; almost, one would have thought, life itself.

But Sir Geoffrey Damyn did not even see her. He had forgotten the present in the past.

"It rained—the watcher did not mind that. He stood without till day broke—till the city was astir. Then they appeared. The cab summoned drove up. With many a kiss and warm embrace and loving word they parted. The man who had been convinced of his disgrace—his because hers—went home and apologised to his own servant for the thrashing he had given him. He sent her back her poor love tokens. He left England."

It was told.

A silence, brief, but almost unendurable, so full of pain it was, fell upon them.

"And now—"

She raised herself erect, stopped him with a gesture.

Just beyond the long leaves of a banana-tree she had caught a glimpse of the Earl's frowning face.

"Hush!"

Damyn gave her a glance of astonishment. He had intended to ask her about the child at the Lodge; to question her concerning the scar upon her palm—indeed, for all this had he begun.

"Listen!"—it seemed strange that from so corpse-like a face speech could proceed—"listen, Geoffrey Damyn. The man whom you saw with the woman you say you loved was her brother—her step-brother—but dear to her as could be one of her own!"

She would tell him the truth, the truth fifty times over, rather than he should have an opportunity to ask, while the Earl (unseen by him) lingered there, a single question about the betraying scar—about baby Willie.

His lip curled.

"She had no brother," he said.

Her ear caught the sound of voices on the grand stairway. The guests were descending.

None you knew of, perhaps, for he had been guilty of embezzlement; was dead to his family and friends. In London he met his sister. He told her he had added to his depravity in the eyes of his family by marrying a former governess of his sister's, who, in spite of his fall, believed in his promise to retrieve, to atone. They were going to sail on the morrow for Australia; there they would begin life anew. He begged her to go and see his wife. She did so—stayed with them all that night. They sailed next day. The ship was wrecked. She was drowned—his true wife; he was saved. He lives in Melbourne to-day."

Was it, could it be aught but a shameless canard—a ruse to clear herself?

Piercingly the consciousness thrilled him. It was true!

Stunned, bewildered, he stood there, stared at her. His breath was coming hoarse and fast. Had they both been deceived?

And now what lay before?

A voice!

They started, guiltily.

The Earl!

Silent, haughty, handsome, he stood before them.

"May I ask the reason for Sir Geoffrey's confidence; for"—bowing to the Countess—"your explanation?"

He had heard, then!

How much?

Quite regardless of the present complication, of the answers Sir Geoffrey Damyn would demand, or anything save the necessity of averting a scene now, her ladyship spoke.

Between them, in her shimmering satin, her glittering diamonds, cold and white and beautiful she stood.

"Sir Geoffrey has been telling me of an old romance of his. He feared the possibility of his pretty innamorata being alive. He throws now, as you know, his heart at Iva's feet. And so he sought a mediator—sought wisely, as it happened, for—rippling and silvery her laugh rings out—"for I can reassure him. He is wholly free. I knew her of whom he speaks. She is dead!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"Mamma! oh, mamma!"

Through the lighted, scented air, over the plashing of the fountain, and the prelude of the band, they heard the happy young voice calling.

And then she caught sight of the trio near the giant oleander.

"I have found you, you laggards?" she cried.

Under the many-hued Chinese lamps between the hedges of leafiness and bloom swiftly she came.

In silence they turned; without a word regarded her.

And what a picture she made! Her gown—of what tint or texture, who shall say?

It was something soft and silken, and airy and shimmering, which blushed as she walked.

In quaintly modern style was the lustrous robe fashioned, with draperies half-drawn through a jewelled chain, and a fall of some silvery-transparent stuff half-veiling the lovely arms.

She carried a bunch of roses, long-stemmed, pink and pearly. The purely outlined face, with its violet black eyes, its laughing scarlet lips, its pride, its pleasures, its joyousness—how lovely it was!

"I've been searching everywhere for you, and here you are having a cozy chat all by yourselves. Do you know it is almost ten, and the first carriage-load is at the door? And, oh, little mamma, how perfectly adorable you do look!"

My lady laughed.

"Do I? I am afraid I am rather ghastly. Sir Geoffrey has been telling me a tale of love and loss and unfaithfulness which has given me the blues. Shall we go?"

Still smiling, she turned to her husband.

A quick fear smote her.

What made him look so gloomy, so forbidding? He gave her no answering smile. His mouth was gravely set under his brown beard.

He bowed. In silence he offered her his arm.

And Sir Geoffrey, with a tremendous effort, recovered himself, turned to Lady Iva with a murmured compliment.

Could he believe the explanation just proffered him? Good Heaven, if it were only true! How in such a case must she not have suf-

fered! And he? Heaven alone knew how bitter the blow had been to him!

In the octagon reception-room, which seemed like a morsel out of a forest dell, all carpeted as it was with thick green velvet, and hung with soft silks of the same hue, the Earl and Countess of Silverdale stood to receive their guests.

At either side of the main entrance stood liveried servants.

Carriages rolled up, paused, and rolled away.

Through the wreathed doorway, into the dazzle, the warmth, the perfume, the music, fast and still faster they came.

A notable gathering. People who prided themselves on their seclusion as well as their exclusiveness were present to-night.

For so many years Silverdale Castle had been dreary and untenanted, this truly was a gala occasion, when a Lady Silverdale, a beauty and a bride, would for the first time receive under her husband's roof.

And so, as has been said, they all came trooping up and in, laughing and snow-flecked, and vanished in dressing-rooms, to reappear shortly, brilliant as any fitting thing ever from chrysalis evolved.

There were dowagers in stiff brocade and dignity to match; old beaux in broadcloth and "antique gallantry" arrayed; young matrons striving to be sedate; girls, pretty and plain, all in festal attire; a sprinkling of military men from Rothlyn; and a crowd of brilliant, clever, well-dressed men and women from London.

And for each and all the new Countess of Silverdale had a smile, a handclasp, and a gracious word.

Would they never cease coming? Not that she wearied—no. The scene, the display, the importance of the affair, held for her both charm and novelty.

Determinedly she had put out of her head the story Geoffrey Damyn had told her.

She must not recall it—not now, at least, she had told herself. How gladly, gratefully she would have heard it, given it credence, a year ago! To-night she had almost hoped it was a lie. But, no! she had gone with poor Charlie to see his wife, just as he had said. Ah, she would not remember—at least not now!

And so, with excitement, with gracious interest in all that was occurring, with compelling the tribute of admiration, with wit of words and merriest of mood, she kept thoughts at bay.

Lord Silverdale did not strive to blindfold himself. He saw, all the time he welcomed his guests with stately cordiality, a vast deal more than he cared to behold.

There was something behind that story in the conservatory. What? He could not tell. But he knew his wife would never grow pale as her gown on hearing of some unfortunate love affair of Geoffrey Damyn's.

She had been immensely affected, that was evident. Why? And why should Damyn insist, with such strange phrases, in confiding in her? He would find out. He would sift this business to the bottom. If Captain Damyn had had any part in her past life he would know how much, and when, and where! Should he demand a plain, unvarnished tale from him? Oh, no! And yet—

He talked and laughed and jested, sauntered through quadrilles, listened to rhapsodies concerning his wife, discussed Irving's latest venture, danced a waltz with Nora Dallas, and brought Mrs. Vere an ice.

But never for one moment did he forget that a drama was being played within his home of which he could not find the key. And the longer he pondered the deeper grew his jealousy, the darker his suspicions.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2061. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.)

Gleanings

WHENEVER there is any doubt about a dog's sanity, an ounce of lead is worth a pound of cure.

If you don't believe that time is money, examine your pocket-book after you have been having "a little time."

CHEAP POSTAL SERVICE.—The cheapest postal service in the world is that of Japan, where for two sen—about seven-tenths of a penny—letters are conveyed all over the empire.

HIGH AUTHORITY.—A rebellious husband was objecting to doing certain work about the house, and he quoted Scripture to his wife, showing that the household duties should properly be assigned to the woman. The good wife replied by reading to her astonished hege 2 Kings xxi. 13: "I will wipe out Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down." That husband has wiped the dishes ever since.

A CURIOUS ACT.—In England in the middle of the eighteenth century a curious Act of Parliament was passed as follows:—"That any woman of whatsoever rank, age, condition, or profession, whether spinster or widow, who from the date of publication of this Act, will, by the help of perfumes, false hair, paints, or other cosmetics, also steel busks, hoops, high heel shoes, false hips, seduce, allure a subject of His Majesty's, will incur the penalty of the law actually in force against sorcery and other manœuvres; and the marriage will be declared null and void."

SOME QUEER "WANT ADS."—A journal for beggars, not long ago started in Paris, sells readily for five cents a copy, which shows that the proprietors know what they are about. The advertisements furnish interesting reading for beggars temporarily out of a job, though it is difficult to understand how the advertiser could expect to receive an answer to the following:—

"Wanted—A blind man who can play the flute a little."

Probably some unfortunate dumb man will tell his blind confrère of the vacancy. Here is another sample of an advertised vacancy requiring rather awkward qualifications:—

"Wanted—A lame man for the sea-side; one without a right arm preferred."

In addition to "ads" of this kind, notices of forthcoming christenings, burials and birthdays of rich people are printed, so that the beggar may know where to go to prosecute his vocation with success. Evidently the trade of mendicancy is established on a good business basis in the French capital.

LONDON CROWDS LOOK MUCH ALIKE.—To the casual observer the thronging thousands of overcrowded London are not easily classified. One readily recognises certain types, as the casuals and tramps and abandoned women, the flotsam and jetsam generally of a city population, which are not widely unlike wherever met. But this carries one but a little way in knowing a city full of industrious workers of all manner of antecedents, and ranging from fourteen years to old age, and engaged in nearly every conceivable industry. There is little, any longer, in the dress of the English working people, as in the case of the working classes in America, to give them a distinctive stamp. The factory girl is a type apart, and the costermonger and the Jew of the sweat-shops, and one imagines that one distinguishes roughly between skilled and unskilled workmen, and certainly between criminals and honest workers, until experience suggests a difficulty. But for those who, from long study of the working-classes of London, have come to know their life and labour, there are ready standards of classification. None is simpler than that of wages.

THE man that can't sing and won't sing deserves the sincere thanks of a musical community.

TRUTH CRUSHED to earth may rise again; but it is with sore ribs, and time wasted in wiping off the mud.

PIGMY CAMELS OF PERSIA.—The western part of Persia is inhabited by a species of camel which is the pigmy of its kind. These camels are snow white, and are on that account almost worshipped by the people. The Shah presented the municipality of Berlin with two of these little wonders. The larger is twenty-seven inches high and weighs sixty-one pounds. The other is four inches less, but the weight is not given.

THE RISE OF THE HOHENZOLLERNS.—Though the German Emperor claims to rule by divine right, in strict history the power of the Hohenzollerns originated in the right of a pawnbroker over an unredemmed pledge. Until the fifteenth century the Kaiser's ancestors were merely Burggraves of Nuremberg. Then Frederick VI. of Hohenzollern accommodated the Emperor Sigismund with a loan of 100,000 gulden on the security of Brandenburg. In 1417 the Hohenzollern moneylender foreclosed on the mortgage, and became in default of the repayment of the 100,000 gulden Elector of the Empire and Frederick I. of Brandenburg. Not until 1701 did the Hohenzollerns become a Royal House and the crowned kings of Prussia, while their Imperial rank dates, of course, from 1871 only.

THE PRUDENT PRINCESS.—There was once a beautiful princess, who had a head on her shoulders, which head was devised for thinking purposes. She caused it to be announced that she was coyly willing to be married if the right man came along. Among the suitors was a wealthy old prince, who was enraptured with her beauty and delighted with her intellect. He cried, "Ah, I could die for you!" "Stand aside," suggested the princess. So the old prince stood aside, and the suitors passed on in line, one after another being rejected. At last there came a young and handsome prince, who had overheard the plea of the wealthy old prince. Now, the young and handsome prince, though he had little money, had considerable sense, so he said: "Ah, I could live for you!" "I am yours," said the prudent princess, "just as soon as the other gentleman dies for me." Moral.—It is easier to get in by inheritance than through a breach of promise suit.

HEROINES OLD AND NEW.—When the world was younger the heroine of the novel used to be described somewhat after this style: Her head was beautifully poised. Her brow was low and broad and white. Her delicately-chiselled nose was of the colour of alabaster, and a faint pinkish glow showed under the velvety surface of her cheeks. Her splendidly-rounded throat was like a marble column; and dimpled, snowy arms showed alluringly through the dainty lace of which the sleeves of her gown were fashioned. Since the heroine plays golf, however, it would hardly be proper to speak of her alabaster brow and pink cheeks. To give her all she deserves the novelist of to-day must picture her thus:—Her rich, faded-out hair was done up in a little knot on top of her head, where she lightly wore a rusty brown Tam-o'-Shanter. Her broad, beautiful brow was about the colour of an old boot, and her delicate, refined nose was covered with freckles, all save the end, which had become a large, irregular blister that was splendidly becoming to her. Her soft, downy cheeks were crooked and brown, as a result of exposure to the weather, and her magnificent neck showed big sunburned cords on the sides that testified to her fine development and unusual strength. The muscles in her almost black arms stood out like those of a machinist, and she had a long, almost manly stride that at once filled the beholder with a sense of her grace, and made him long instinctively to be her protector.

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It is impossible to take too much care of one's eyes, and those who value their eyesight will do well to send to STEPHEN GREEN, 210, Lambeth Road, London, for a little book "How to Preserve the Eyesight," which tells the story of a cure for all troubles of the eyes, eye-lashes, and eyelids. SINGLETON'S EYE OINTMENT has proved its virtues during 300 years, and it may be obtained of all chemists and stores in ancient pedestal pots for 2/- each.

—FWS—

A VALUABLE DETECTIVE.—But for the camera, scores of criminals would now be at liberty to carry on their illegal practices. In all cases of forgery, photography is invaluable; for there is no forger in the world clever enough to baffle its detective skill. An interesting proof of this was provided, a few years ago, in the case of a forged will. An enlarged photograph revealed the pencilled lines over which the signatures of the testator and witness had been written, although no trace of them was visible even under the microscope. This is one of the peculiarities of the camera, that it brings to light marks which are quite invisible even through a microscope, just as it has been known to reveal the signs of measles and small-pox several days before they become visible to the naked eye. Where a forged signature is suspected the method adopted is to take photographs of the genuine and supposed false signatures, magnifying each a hundred fold or more, and compare the results. Under this crucial test the slightest discrepancy becomes exaggerated out of all comparison with the signature; and every sign of hesitancy (for no forger can write a counterfeit signature with perfect ease and fluency) stands revealed. A forged bank-note, however minutely and faithfully the original may have been copied, cannot deceive the eye of the camera, which will not only show the slightest deviation from the genuine note, but also any difference in the texture of the paper used. In a recent case, where a section of a cheque had been removed and another piece in the form of pulp substituted with infinite skill, the camera revealed the fraud at once, showing exactly where the new and old paper were joined.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

J. T.—George Washington was a mason.
BRUTUS (Hanley).—The dog license was raised from 5s. to 7s. 6d. on June 1, 1878.

SAUCY NELL.—If they are legally married there is no occasion to again go through the ceremony.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—A lodger's goods cannot be seized for rent or rates due by the tenants of the house.

J. T. B.—The English law does not allow a husband to put his wife into the workhouse for misconduct.

CLARENCE.—The mole has eyes, but they are very small. Its senses of hearing and smell are very sharp.

R. R.—Offenbach is the chief manufacturing town of the Grand Duchy of Hesse, Germany. It contains a castle, and has manufactories of cottons and woollens, carriages, cards, musical instruments, jewellery, and other wares.

ROSALIND.—1. A little common soda in the water should make your hair lighter, but it must not be used too often or too strong, or it will make the hair brittle. 2. Marriage properly performed before the registrar is perfectly legal. 3. I have no acquaintance with the gentleman, and if I had, I should not publish his private affairs in these columns.

E. H. G.—Leap year comes (with certain exceptions) once in every four years. The next leap year will be 1904.

EFFIE.—Charles Reade, the novelist, was born at Ipsden, Oxfordshire, England, in 1814, and died April 11, 1884.

G. S.—Religious and political subjects are never touched upon here, and the settlement of disputes or arguments on such themes is always left to the interested parties.

E. G. H.—Celluloid is extensively used in making imitation india-rubber combs and other toilet articles. It is also employed in the manufacture of stereotype plates, but there is no record of its having been utilised in rubber-stamp making.

GERTIE.—An only child is born with the same natural disposition which it would have if it were only one of a dozen children. It is the indulgence with which an only child is treated which makes it develop into a selfish boy or girl.

CONSTANCE.—No dependence can be placed on a man who, while in the company of a lady friend, will deliberately flirt with others. He should have enough gentlemanliness to abstain from such reprehensible actions while in her presence, or where she can view his inconstancy.

HAROLD.—The celebrated porcelain tower of Nanking, China, destroyed during the Taiping rebellion, was built in 1431-32, and was of octagonal form, 260 feet high, in nine storeys, each adorned with a cornice and gallery, and covered with a roof of green tiles, with a bell suspended at each corner, which sounded when moved by the wind. On the top was a pineapple in the shape of a pineapple, surmounted by a gilded ball. A spiral staircase led to the summit.

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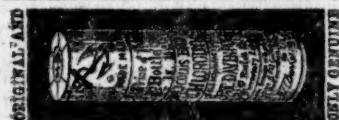
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